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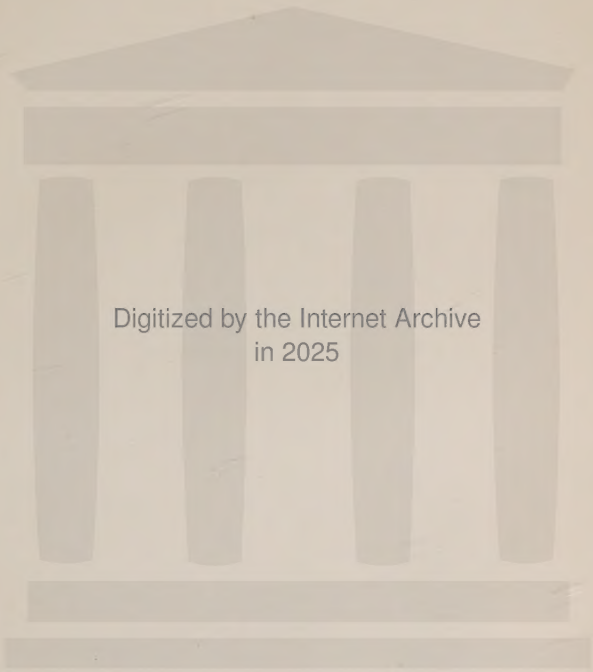
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English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

VOL. II

MILTON

GOLDSMITH

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MILTON

By MARK PATTISON, B.D.

GOLDSMITH

By WILLIAM BLACK

COWPER

By GOLDWIN SMITH

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

MILTON

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BY

MARK PATTISON, B.D.

RECTOR OF LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD

London

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MILTON

MILTON.

FIRST PERIOD. 1608—1639.

CHAPTER I.

FAMILY—SCHOOL—COLLEGE.

In the seventeenth century it was not the custom to publish two volumes upon every man or woman whose name had appeared on a title-page. Nor, where lives of authors were written, were they written with the redundancy of particulars which is now allowed. Especially are the lives of the poets and dramatists obscure and meagrely recorded. Of Milton, however, we know more personal details than of any man of letters of that age. Edward Phillips, the poet's nephew, who was brought up by his uncle, and lived in habits of intercourse with him to the last, wrote a life, brief, inexact, superficial, but valuable from the nearness of the writer to the subject of his memoir. A cotemporary of Milton, John Aubrey (b. 1625), "a very honest man, and accurate in his accounts of matters of fact," as Toland says of him, made it his business to learn all he could about Milton's habits. Aubrey was himself

acquainted with Milton, and diligently catechised the poet's widow, his brother, and his nephew, scrupulously writing down each detail as it came to him, in the minutes of lives which he supplied to Antony Wood to be worked up in his *Athenæ* and *Fasti*. Aubrey was only an antiquarian collector, and was mainly dependent on what could be learned from the family. None of Milton's family, and least of all Edward Phillips, were of a capacity to apprehend moral or mental qualities, and they could only tell Aubrey of his goings out and his comings in, of the clothes he wore, the dates of events, the names of his acquaintance. In compensation for the want of observation on the part of his own kith and kin, Milton himself, with a superb and ingenuous egotism, has revealed the secret of his thoughts and feelings in numerous autobiographical passages of his prose writings. From what he directly communicates, and from what he unconsciously betrays, we obtain an internal life of the mind, more ample than that external life of the bodily machine, which we owe to Aubrey and Phillips.

In our own generation all that printed books or written documents have preserved about Milton has been laboriously brought together by Professor David Masson, in whose *Life of Milton* we have the most exhaustive biography that ever was compiled of any Englishman. It is a noble and final monument erected to the poet's memory, two centuries after his death. My excuse for attempting to write of Milton after Mr. Masson is that his life is in six volumes octavo, with a total of some four to five thousand pages. The present outline is written for a different class of readers, those, namely, who cannot afford to know more of Milton than can be told in some two hundred and fifty pages.

A family of Miltons, deriving the name in all probability from the parish of Great Milton near Thame, is found in various branches spread over Oxfordshire and the adjoining counties in the reign of Elisabeth. The poet's grandfather was a substantial yeoman, living at Stanton St. John, about five miles from Oxford, within the forest of Shotover, of which he was also an under-ranger. The ranger's son John was at school in Oxford, possibly as a chorister, conformed to the Established Church, and was in consequence cast off by his father, who adhered to the old faith. The disinherited son went up to London, and by the assistance of a friend was set up in business as a scrivener. A scrivener discharged some of the functions which, at the present day, are undertaken for us in a solicitor's office. John Milton the father, being a man of probity and force of character, was soon on the way to acquire "a plentiful fortune." But he continued to live over his shop, which was in Bread Street, Cheapside, and which bore the sign of the Spread Eagle, the family crest.

It was at the Spread Eagle that his eldest son, John Milton, was born, 9th December, 1608, being thus exactly cotemporary with Lord Clarendon, who also died in the same year as the poet. Milton must be added to the long roll of our poets who have been natives of the city which now never sees sunlight or blue sky, along with Chaucer, Spenser, Herrick, Cowley, Shirley, Ben Jonson, Pope, Gray, Keats. Besides attending as a day-scholar at St. Paul's School, which was close at hand, his father engaged for him a private tutor at home. The household of the Spread Eagle not only enjoyed civic prosperity, but some share of that liberal cultivation, which, if not imbibed in the home, neither school nor college ever confers. The scrivener was not

only an amateur in music, but a composer, whose tunes, songs, and airs found their way into the best collections of music. Both schoolmaster and tutor were men of mark. The high master of St. Paul's at that time was Alexander Gill, an M.A. of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who was "esteemed to have such an excellent way of training up youth, that none in his time went beyond it." The private tutor was Thomas Young, who was, or had been, curate to Mr. Gataker, of Rotherhithe, itself a certificate of merit, even if we had not the pupil's emphatic testimony of gratitude. Milton's fourth elegy is addressed to Young, when, in 1627, he was settled at Hamburg, crediting him with having first infused into his pupil a taste for classic literature and poetry. Biographers have derived Milton's Presbyterianism in 1641 from the lessons twenty years before of this Thomas Young, a Scotchman, and one of the authors of the *Smectymnuus*. This, however, is a misreading of Milton's mind—a mind which was an organic whole—"whose seed was in itself," self-determined; not one whose opinions can be accounted for by contagion or casual impact.

Of Milton's boyish exercises two have been preserved. They are English paraphrases of two of the Davidic Psalms, and were done at the age of fifteen. That they were thought by himself worth printing in the same volume with *Comus*, is the most noteworthy thing about them. No words are so commonplace but that they can be made to yield inference by a biographer. And even in these school exercises we think we can discern that the future poet was already a diligent reader of Sylvester's *Du Bartas* (1605), the patriarch of Protestant poetry, and of Fairfax's *Tasso* (1600). There are other indications that, from very early years, poetry had assumed

a place in Milton's mind, not merely as a juvenile pastime, but as an occupation of serious import.

Young Gill, son of the high master, a school-fellow of Milton, went up to Trinity, Oxford, where he got into trouble by being informed against by Chillingworth, who reported incautious political speeches of Gill to his godfather, Laud. With Gill Milton corresponded; they exchanged their verses, Greek, Latin, and English, with a confession on Milton's part that he prefers English and Latin composition to Greek; that to write Greek verses in this age is to sing to the deaf. Gill, Milton finds "a severe critic of poetry, however disposed to be lenient to his friend's attempts."

If Milton's genius did not announce itself in his paraphrases of Psalms, it did in his impetuosity in learning, "which I seized with such eagerness that from the twelfth year of my age, I scarce ever went to bed before midnight." Such is his own account. And it is worth notice that we have here an incidental test of the trustworthiness of Aubrey's reminiscences. Aubrey's words are, "When he was very young he studied very hard, and sate up very late, commonly till twelve or one o'clock at night; and his father ordered the maid to sit up for him."

He was ready for college at sixteen, not earlier than the usual age at that period. As his schoolmasters, both the Gills, were Oxford men (Young was of St. Andrew's), it might have been expected that the young scholar would have been placed at Oxford. However, it was determined that he should go to Cambridge, where he was admitted a pensioner of Christ's, 12th February, 1625, and commenced residence in the Easter term ensuing. Perhaps his father feared the growing High Church, or, as it was

then called, Arminianism, of his own university. It so happened, however, that the tutor to whom the young Milton was consigned was specially noted for Arminian proclivities. This was William Chappell, then Fellow of Christ's, who so recommended himself to Laud by his party zeal, that he was advanced to be Provost of Dublin and Bishop of Cork.

Milton was one of those pupils who are more likely to react against a tutor than to take a ply from him. A preaching divine—Chappell composed a treatise on the art of preaching—a narrow ecclesiastic of the type loved by Laud, was exactly the man who would drive Milton into opposition. But the tutor of the seventeenth century was not able, like the easy-going tutor of the eighteenth, to leave the young rebel to pursue the reading of his choice in his own chamber. Chappell endeavoured to drive his pupil along the scholastic highway of exercises. Milton, returning to Cambridge after his summer vacation, eager for the acquisition of wisdom, complains that he "was dragged from his studies, and compelled to employ himself in composing some frivolous declamation!" Indocile, as he confesses himself (indocilisque ætas prava magistra fuit), he kicked against either the discipline or the exercises exacted by college rules. He was punished. Aubrey had heard that he was flogged, a thing not impossible in itself, as the *Admonition Book* of Emanuel gives an instance of corporal chastisement as late as 1667. Aubrey's statement, however, is a dubitative interlineation in his MS., and Milton's age, seventeen, as well as the silence of his later detractors, who raked up everything which could be told to his disadvantage, concur to make us hesitate to accept a fact on so slender evidence. Anyhow, Milton was sent away from college for a time, in the

year 1627, in consequence of something unpleasant which had occurred. That it was something of which he was not ashamed is clear, from his alluding to it himself in the lines written at the time,—

> Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri
> Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.

And that the tutor was not considered to have been wholly free from blame is evident from the fact that the master transferred Milton from Chappell to another tutor, a very unusual proceeding. Whatever the nature of the punishment, it was not what is known as rustication; for Milton did not lose a term, taking his two degrees of B.A. and M.A. in regular course, at the earliest date from his matriculation permitted by the statutes. The one outbreak of juvenile petulance and indiscipline over, Milton's force of character and unusual attainments acquired him the esteem of his seniors. The nickname of "the lady of Christ's" given him in derision by his fellow-students, is an attestation of virtuous conduct. Ten years later, in 1642, Milton takes an opportunity to "acknowledge publicly, with all grateful mind, that more than ordinary respect which I found, above many of my equals, at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the Fellows of that college wherein I spent some years; who, at my parting after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many ways how much better it would content them that I would stay; as by many letters full of kindness and loving respect, both before that time and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection towards me."

The words "how much better it would content them that I would stay" have been thought to hint at the

offer of a fellowship at Christ's. It is highly improbable that such an offer was ever made. There had been two vacancies in the roll of fellows since Milton had become eligible by taking his B.A. degree, and he had been passed over in favour of juniors. It is possible that Milton was not statutably eligible, for, by the statutes of Christ's, there could not be, at one time, more than two fellows who were natives of the same county. Edward King, who was Milton's junior, was put in, not by college election, but by royal mandate. And in universities generally, it is not literature or general acquirements which recommend a candidate for endowed posts, but technical skill in the prescribed exercises, and a pedagogic intention.

Further than this, had a fellowship in his college been attainable, it would not have had much attraction for Milton. A fellowship implied two things, residence in college, with teaching, and orders in the church. With neither of these two conditions was Milton prepared to comply. In 1632, when he proceeded to his M.A. degree, Milton was twenty-four, he had been seven years in college, and had therefore sufficient experience what college life was like. He who was so impatient of the "turba legentum prava" in the Bodleian library, could not have patiently consorted with the vulgar-minded and illiterate ecclesiastics, who peopled the colleges of that day. Even Mede, though the author of *Clavis Apocalyptica* was steeped in the soulless clericalism of his age, could not support his brother-fellows without frequent retirements to Balsham, "being not willing to be joined with such company." To be dependent upon Bainbrigge's (the Master of Christ's) good pleasure for a supply of pupils; to have to live in daily intercourse

with the Powers and the Chappells, such as we know them from Mede's letters, was an existence to which only the want of daily bread could have driven Milton. Happily his father's circumstances were not such as to make a fellowship pecuniarily an object to the son. If he longed for "the studious cloister's pale," he had been, now for seven years, near enough to college life to have dispelled the dream that it was a life of lettered leisure and philosophic retirement. It was just about Milton's time that the college tutor finally supplanted the university professor, a system which implied the substitution of excercises performed by the pupil for instruction given by the teacher. Whatever advantages this system brought with it, it brought inevitably the degradation of the teacher, who was thus dispensed from knowledge, having only to attend to form. The time of the college tutor was engrossed by the details of scholastic superintendence, and the frivolous worry of academical business. Admissions, matriculations, disputations, declamations, the formalities of degrees, public reception of royal and noble visitors, filled every hour of his day, and left no time, even if he had had the taste, for private study. To teaching, as we shall see, Milton was far from averse. But then it must be teaching as he understood it, a teaching which should expand the intellect and raise the character, not dexterity in playing with the verbal formulæ of the disputations of the schools.

Such an occupation could have no attractions for one who was even now meditating *Il Penseroso* (composed 1633). At twenty he had already confided to his schoolfellow, the younger Gill, the secret of his discontent with the Cambridge tone. "Here among us," he writes from college, "are barely one or two who do not flutter

off, all unfledged, into theology, having gotten of philology or of philosophy scarce so much as a smattering. And for theology they are content with just what is enough to enable them to patch up a paltry sermon." He retained the same feeling towards his Alma Mater in 1641, when he wrote (Reason of Church Government), "Cambridge, which as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now much less . . . ."

On a review of all these indications of feeling, I should conclude that Milton never had serious thoughts of a college fellowship, and that his antipathy arose from a sense of his own incompatibility of temper with academic life, and was not, like Phineas Fletcher's, the result of disappointed hopes, and a sense of injury for having been refused a fellowship at King's. One consideration which remains to be mentioned would alone be decisive in favour of this view. A fellowship required orders. Milton had been intended for the church, and had been sent to college with that view. By the time he left Cambridge, at twenty-four, it had become clear, both to himself and his family, that he could never submit his understanding to the trammels of church formularies. His later mind, about 1641, is expressed by himself in his own forcible style,—"The church, to whose service by the intention of my parents and friends I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded in the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal. . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." When he took

leave of the university, in 1632, he had perhaps not developed this distinct antipathy to the establishment. For in a letter, preserved in Trinity College, and written in the winter of 1631-32, he does not put forward any conscientious objections to the clerical profession, but only apologises to the friend to whom the letter is addressed, for delay in making choice of some profession. The delay itself sprung from an unconscious distaste. In a mind of the consistent texture of Milton's, motives are secretly influential before they emerge in consciousness. We shall not be wrong in asserting that when he left Cambridge in 1632, it was already impossible, in the nature of things, that he should have taken orders in the Church of England, or a fellowship of which orders were a condition.

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE AT HORTON—L'ALLEGRO—IL PENSEROSO—ARCADES—COMUS—LYCIDAS.

Milton had been sent to college to qualify for a profession. The church, the first intended, he had gradually discovered to be incompatible. Of the law, either his father's branch, or some other, he seems to have entertained a thought, but to have speedily dismissed it. So at the age of twenty-four he returned to his father's house, bringing nothing with him but his education and a silent purpose. The elder Milton had now retired from business, with sufficient means but not with wealth. Though John was the eldest son, there were two other children, a brother, Christopher, and a sister, Anne. To have no profession, even a nominal one, to be above trade and below the status of squire or yeoman, and to come home with the avowed object of leading an idle life, was conduct which required justification. Milton felt it to be so. In a letter addressed, in 1632, to some senior friend at Cambridge, name unknown, he thanks him for being "a good watchman to admonish that the hours of the night pass on, for so I call my life as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind, and that the day with me is at hand,

wherein Christ commands all to labour." Milton has no misgivings. He knows that what he is doing with himself is the best he can do. His aim is far above bread-winning, and therefore his probation must be long. He destines for himself no indolent tarrying in the garden of Armida. His is a "mind made and set wholly on the accomplishment of greatest things." He knows that the looker-on will hardly accept his apology for "being late," that it is in order to being "more fit." Yet it is the only apology he can offer. And he is dissatisfied with his own progress. "I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me."

Of this frame of mind the record is the second sonnet, lines which are an inseparable part of Milton's biography—

> How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
> Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
> That I to manhood am arrived so near,
> And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
> That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
> Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven.
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

With aspirations thus vast, though unformed, with "amplitude of mind to greatest deeds," Milton retired to his father's house in the country. Five more years of self-education, added to the seven years of academical residence, were not too much for the meditation of projects such as Milton was already conceiving. Years many

more than twelve, filled with great events and distracting interests, were to pass over before the body and shape of *Paradise Lost* was given to these imaginings.

The country retirement in which the elder Milton had fixed himself was the little village of Horton, situated in that southernmost angle of the county of Buckingham, which insinuates itself between Berks and Middlesex. Though London was only about seventeen miles distant, it was the London of Charles I., with its population of some 300,000 only; before coaches and macadamised roads; while the Colne, which flows through the village, was still a river, and not the kennel of a paper-mill. There was no lack of water and wood, meadow and pasture, closes and open field, with the regal towers of Windsor "bosom'd high in tufted trees," to crown the landscape. Unbroken leisure, solitude, tranquillity of mind, surrounded by the thickets and woods, which Pliny thought indispensable to poetical meditation (Epist. 9. 10), no poet's career was ever commenced under more favourable auspices. The youth of Milton stands in strong contrast with the misery, turmoil, chance medley, struggle with poverty, or abandonment to dissipation, which blighted the early years of so many of our men of letters.

Milton's life is a drama in three acts. The first discovers him in the calm and peaceful retirement of Horton, of which *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* are the expression. In the second act he is breathing the foul and heated atmosphere of party passion and religious hate, generating the lurid fires which glare in the battailous canticles of his prose pamphlets. The three great poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, are the utterance of his final period of solitary and Promethean grandeur, when, blind, destitute, friend-

less, he testified of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, alone before a fallen world.

In this delicious retirement of Horton, in alternate communing with nature and with books, for five years of persevering study he laid in a stock, not of learning, but of what is far above learning, of wide and accurate knowledge. Of the man whose profession is learning, it is characteristic that knowledge is its own end, and research its own reward. To Milton all knowledge, all life, virtue itself, was already only a means to a further end. He will know only "that which is of use to know," and by useful, he meant that which conduced to form him for his vocation of poet.

From a very early period Milton had taken poetry to be his vocation, in the most solemn and earnest mood. The idea of this devotion was the shaping idea of his life. It was, indeed, a bent of nature, with roots drawing from deeper strata of character than any act of reasoned will, which kept him out of the professions, and now fixed him, a seeming idler, but really hard at work, in his father's house at Horton. The intimation which he had given of his purpose in the sonnet above quoted had become, in 1641, "an inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times, as they should not willingly let it die."

What the ultimate form of his poetic utterance shall be, he is in no hurry to decide. He will be "long choosing," and quite content to be "beginning late." All his care at present is to qualify himself for the lofty function to which he aspires. No lawyer, physician, statesman, ever laboured to fit himself for his profession harder than

Milton strove to qualify himself for his vocation of poet. Verse-making is, to the wits, a game of ingenuity; to Milton, it is a prophetic office, towards which the will of heaven leads him. The creation he contemplates will not flow from him as the stanzas of the *Gerusalemme* did from Tasso at twenty-one. Before he can make a poem, Milton will make himself. "I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem . . . . not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praise-worthy."

Of the spontaneity, the abandon, which are supposed to be characteristic of the poetical nature, there is nothing here; all is moral purpose, precision, self-dedication. So he acquires all knowledge, not for knowledge' sake, from the instinct of learning, the necessity for completeness, but because he is to be a poet. Nor will he only have knowledge, he will have wisdom; moral development shall go hand in hand with intellectual. A poet's soul should "contain of good, wise, just, the perfect shape." He will cherish continually a pure mind in a pure body. "I argued to myself that, if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable." There is yet a third constituent of the poetical nature; to knowledge and to virtue must be added religion. For it is from God that the poet's thoughts come. "This is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge,

and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs; till which in some measure be compast, I refuse not to sustain this expectation." Before the piety of this vow, Dr. Johnson's morosity yields for a moment, and he is forced to exclaim, "From a promise like this, at once fervid, pious, and rational, might be expected the *Paradise Lost*."

Of these years of self-cultivation, of conscious moral architecture, such as Plato enacted for his ideal State, but none but Milton ever had the courage to practise, the biographer would gladly give a minute account. But the means of doing so are wanting. The poet kept no diary of his reading, such as some great students, e. g. Isaac Casaubon, have left. Nor could such a record, had it been attempted, have shown us the secret process by which the scholar's dead learning was transmuted in Milton's mind into living imagery. "Many studious and contemplative years, altogether spent in the search of religious and civil knowledge" is his own description of the period. "You make many inquiries as to what I am about;" he writes to Diodati—"what am I thinking of? Why, with God's help, of immortality! Forgive the word, I only whisper it in your ear! Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight." This was in 1637, at the end of five years of the Horton probation. The poems, which, rightly read, are strewn with autobiographical hints, are not silent as to the intention of this period. In *Paradise Regained* (i. 196), Milton reveals himself. And in *Comus*, written at Horton, the lines 375 and following are charged with the same sentiment,—

> And wisdom's self
> Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
> Where, with her best nurse, contemplation,
> She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
> That in the various bustle of resort
> Were all-to ruffled and sometimes impair'd.

That at Horton Milton "read all the Greek and Latin writers" is one of Johnson's careless versions of Milton's own words, "enjoyed a complete holiday in turning over Latin and Greek authors." Milton read, not as a professional philologian, but as a poet and scholar, and always in the light of his secret purpose. It was not in his way to sit down to read over all the Greek and Latin writers, as Casaubon or Salmasius might do. Milton read with selection, and "meditated," says Aubrey, what he read. His practice conformed to the principle he has himself laid down in the often-quoted lines (*Paradise Regained*, iv. 322)—

> Who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself.

Some of Milton's Greek books have been traced; his *Aratus*, *Lycophron*, *Euripides* (the Stephanus of 1602), and his *Pindar* (the Benedictus of 1620), are still extant, with marginal memoranda, which should seem to evince careful and discerning reading. One critic even thought it worth while to accuse Joshua Barnes of silently appropriating conjectural emendations from Milton's *Euripides*. But Milton's own poems are the best evidence of his familiarity with all that is most choice in the remains of classic poetry. Though the commentators are accused of often seeing an imitation where there is none, no com-

mentary can point out the ever-present infusion of classical flavour, which bespeaks intimate converse far more than direct adaptation. Milton's classical allusions, says Hartley Coleridge, are amalgamated and consubstantiated with his native thought.

A commonplace book of Milton's, after having lurked unsuspected for 200 years in the archives of Netherby, has been disinterred in our own day (1874). It appears to belong partly to the end of the Horton period. It is not by any means an account of all that he is reading, but only an arrangement, under certain heads, or places of memoranda for future use. These notes are extracted from about eighty different authors, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English. Of Greek authors no less than sixteen are quoted. The notes are mostly notes of historical facts, seldom of thoughts, never of mere verbal expression. There is no trace in it of any intention to store up either the imagery or the language of poetry. It may be that such notes were made and entered in another volume; for the book thus accidentally preserved to us seems to refer to other similar volumes of collections. But it is more likely that no such poetical memoranda were ever made, and that Milton trusted entirely to memory for the wealth of classical allusion with which his verse is surcharged. He did not extract from the poets and the great writers whom he was daily turning over, but only from the inferior authors and secondary historians, which he read only once. Most of the material collected in the commonplace book is used in his prose pamphlets. But when so employed the facts are worked into the texture of his argument, rather than cited as extraneous witnesses.

In reading history it was his aim to get at a conspectus of

the general current of affairs rather than to study minutely a special period. He tells Diodati in September, 1637, that he has studied Greek history continuously, from the beginning to the fall of Constantinople. When he tells the same friend that he has been long involved in the obscurity of the early middle ages of Italian History down to the time of the Emperor Rudolph, we learn from the commonplace book that he had only been reading the one volume of Sigonius's *Historia Regni Italici*. From the thirteenth century downwards he proposes to himself to study each Italian state in some separate history. Even before his journey to Italy he read Italian with as much ease as French. He tells us that it was by his father's advice that he had acquired these modern languages. But we can see that they were essential parts of his own scheme of self-education, which included, in another direction, Hebrew, both Biblical and Rabbinical, and even Syriac.

The intensity of his nature showed itself in his method of study. He read, not desultorily, a bit here and another there, but "when I take up with a thing, I never pause or break it off, nor am drawn away from it by any other interest, till I have arrived at the goal I proposed to myself." He made breaks occasionally in this routine of study by visits to London, to see friends, to buy books, to take lessons in mathematics, to go to the theatre, or to concerts. A love of music was inherited from his father.

I have called this period, 1632-39, one of preparation, and not of production. But though the first volume of poems printed by Milton did not appear till 1645, the most considerable part of its contents was written during the period included in the present chapter.

The fame of the author of *Paradise Lost* has over-

shadowed that of the author of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. Yet had *Paradise Lost* never been written, these three poems, with *Comus*, would have sufficed to place their author in a class apart, and above all those who had used the English language for poetical purposes before him. It is incumbent on Milton's biographer to relate the circumstances of the composition of *Comus*, as it is an incident in the life of the poet.

Milton's musical tastes had brought him the acquaintance of Henry Lawes, at that time the most celebrated composer in England. When the Earl of Bridgewater would give an entertainment at Ludlow Castle to celebrate his entry upon his office as President of Wales and the Marches, it was to Lawes that application was made to furnish the music. Lawes, as naturally, applied to his young poetical acquaintance Milton, to write the words. The entertainment was to be of that sort which was fashionable at court, and was called a Mask. In that brilliant period of court life which was inaugurated by Elisabeth and put an end to by the Civil War, a Mask was a frequent and favourite amusement. It was an exhibition in which pageantry and music predominated, but in which dialogue was introduced as accompaniment or explanation.

The dramatic Mask of the sixteenth century has been traced by the antiquaries as far back as the time of Edward III. But in its perfected shape it was a genuine offspring of the English renaissance, a cross between the vernacular mummery, or mystery-play, and the Greek drama. No great court festival was considered complete without such a public show. Many of our great dramatic writers, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, Shirley, Carew, were constrained by the fashion

of the time to apply their invention to gratify this taste for decorative representation. No less an artist than Inigo Jones must occasionally stoop to construct the machinery.

The taste for grotesque pageant in the open air must have gradually died out before the general advance of refinement. The Mask by a process of evolution would have become the Opera. But it often happens that when a taste or fashion is at the point of death, it undergoes a forced and temporary revival. So it was with the Mask. In 1633, the Puritan hatred to the theatre had blazed out in Prynne's *Histriomastix*, and as a natural consequence, the loyal and cavalier portion of society threw itself into dramatic amusements of every kind. It was an unreal revival of the Mask, stimulated by political passion, in the wane of genuine taste for the fantastic and semi-barbarous pageant, in which the former age had delighted. What the imagination of the spectators was no longer equal to, was to be supplied by costliness of dress and scenery. These last representations of the expiring Mask were the occasions of an extravagant outlay. The Inns of Court and Whitehall vied with each other in the splendour and solemnity with which they brought out,—the Lawyers, Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*,—the Court, Carew's *Cœlum Britannicum*.

It was a strange caprice of fortune that made the future poet of the Puritan epic the last composer of a cavalier mask. The slight plot, or story, of *Comus* was probably suggested to Milton by his recollection of George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, which he may have seen on the stage. The personage of *Comus* was borrowed from a Latin extravaganza by a Dutch professor, whose *Comus* was reprinted at Oxford in 1634, the very year in which

Milton wrote his *Mask*. The so-called tradition collected by Oldys, of the young Egertons, who acted in *Comus*, having lost themselves in Haywood Forest on their way to Ludlow, obviously grew out of Milton's poem. However casual the suggestion, or unpromising the occasion, Milton worked out of it a strain of poetry such as had never been heard in England before. If any reader wishes to realise the immense step upon what had gone before him, which was now made by a young man of twenty-seven, he should turn over some of the most celebrated of the masks of the Jacobean period.

We have no information how *Comus* was received when represented at Ludlow, but it found a public of readers. For Lawes, who had the MS. in his hands, was so importuned for copies that, in 1637, he caused an edition to be printed off. Not surreptitiously; for though Lawes does not say, in the dedication to Lord Brackley, that he had the author's leave to print, we are sure that he had it, only from the motto. On the title page of this edition (1637), is the line,—

> Eheu! quid volui misero mihi! floribus austrum
> Perditus—

The words are Virgil's, but the appropriation of them, and their application in this "second intention" is too exquisite to have been made by any but Milton.

To the poems of the Horton period belong also the two pieces *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. He was probably in the early stage of acquiring the language, when he superscribed the two first poems with their Italian titles. For there is no such word as "Penseroso," the adjective formed from "Pensiero" being "pensieroso." Even had the word been written correctly, its significa-

tion is not that which Milton intended, viz. thoughtful, or contemplative, but anxious, full of cares, carking. The rapid purification of Milton's taste will be best perceived by comparing *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* of uncertain date, but written after 1632, with the *Ode on the Nativity*, written 1629. The Ode, notwithstanding its foretaste of Milton's grandeur, abounds in frigid conceits, from which the two later pieces are free. The Ode is frosty, as written in winter, within the four walls of a college chamber. The two idylls breathe the free air of spring and summer, and of the fields round Horton. They are thoroughly naturalistic; the choicest expression our language has yet found of the fresh charm of country life, not as that life is lived by the peasant, but as it is felt by a young and lettered student, issuing at early dawn, or at sunset, into the fields from his chamber and his books. All rural sights and sounds and smells are here blended in that ineffable combination, which once or twice perhaps in our lives has saluted our young senses before their perceptions were blunted by alcohol, by lust, or ambition, or diluted by the social distractions of great cities.

The fidelity to nature of the imagery of these poems has been impugned by the critics.

> Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
> And at my window bid good morrow.

The skylark never approaches human habitations in this way, as the redbreast does. Mr. Masson replies that the subject of the verb "to come" is, not the skylark, but L'Allegro, the joyous student. I cannot construe the lines as Mr. Masson does, even though the consequence were to convict Milton, a city-bred youth, of not knowing a skylark from a sparrow when he saw it. A close observer of things around us would not speak of the

eglantine as twisted, of the cowslip as wan, of the violet as glowing, or of the reed as balmy. Lycidas' laureate hearse is to be strewn at once with primrose and woodbine, daffodil and jasmine. When we read "the rathe primrose that forsaken dies," we see that the poet is recollecting Shakespeare (Winter's Tale, 4. 4), not looking at the primrose. The pine is not "rooted deep as high" (*P. R.* 4416), but sends its roots along the surface. The elm, one of the thinnest foliaged trees of the forest, is inappropriately named starproof (*Arc.* 89). Lightning does not singe the tops of trees (*P. L.* i. 613), but either shivers them, or cuts a groove down the stem to the ground. These and other such like inaccuracies must be set down partly to conventional language used without meaning, the vice of Latin versification enforced as a task, but they are partly due to real defect of natural knowledge.

Other objections of the critics on the same score, which may be met with, are easily dismissed. The objector, who can discover no reason why the oak should be styled "monumental," meets with his match in the defender who suggests, that it may be rightly so called because monuments in churches are made of oak. I should tremble to have to offer an explanation to critics of Milton so acute as these two. But of less ingenious readers I would ask, if any single word can be found equal to "monumental" in its power of suggesting to the imagination the historic oak of park or chase, up to the knees in fern, which has outlasted ten generations of men; has been the mute witness of the scenes of love, treachery, or violence enacted in the baronial hall which it shadows and protects; and has been so associated with man, that it is now rather a column and memorial obelisk than a tree of the forest?

These are the humours of criticism. But, apart from these, a naturalist is at once aware that Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of a naturalist. At no time, even before his loss of sight, was he an exact observer of natural objects. It may be that he knew a skylark from a redbreast, and did not confound the dog-rose with the honeysuckle. But I am sure that he had never acquired that interest in nature's things and ways, which leads to close and loving watching of them. He had not that sense of outdoor nature, empirical and not scientific, which endows the *Angler* of his cotemporary Walton, with its enduring charm, and which is to be acquired only by living in the open country in childhood. Milton is not a man of the fields, but of books. His life is in his study, and when he steps abroad into the air he carries his study thoughts with him. He does look at nature, but he sees her through books. Natural impressions are received from without, but always in those forms of beautiful speech, in which the poets of all ages have clothed them. His epithets are not, like the epithets of the school of Dryden and Pope, culled from the *Gradus ad Parnassum;* they are expressive of some reality, but it is of a real emotion in the spectator's soul, not of any quality detected by keen insight in the objects themselves. This emotion Milton's art stamps with an epithet, which shall convey the added charm of classical reminiscence. When, e.g., he speaks of "the wand'ring moon," the original significance of the epithet comes home to the scholarly reader with the enhanced effect of its association with the "errantem lunam" of Virgil. Nor because it is adopted from Virgil has the epithet here the second-hand effect of a copy. If Milton sees nature through books, he still sees it.

To behold the wand'ring moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray,
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bow'd,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

No allegation that "wand'ring moon" is borrowed from Horace can hide from us that Milton, though he remembered Horace, had watched the phenomenon with a feeling so intense that he projected his own soul's throb into the object before him, and named it with what Thomson calls "recollected love."

Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a scientific naturalist, nor even that of a close observer. It is that of a poet who feels its total influence too powerfully to dissect it. If, as I have said, Milton reads books first and nature afterwards, it is not to test nature by his books, but to learn from both. He is learning not books, but from books. All he reads, sees, hears, is to him but nutriment for the soul. He is making himself. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man, not only in its more vulgar uses, but as an excitant of fine emotion. He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impressions they make on a sensitive soul. The external forms of things are to be presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet. The moon is endowed with life and will, "stooping," "riding," "wand'ring," "bowing her head," not as a frigid personification, and because the ancient poets so personified her, but by communication to her of the intense agitation which the nocturnal spectacle rouses in the poet's own breast.

I have sometimes read that these two idylls are "mas-

terpieces of description." Other critics will ask if in the scenery of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton has described the country about Horton, in Bucks, or that about Forest Hill, in Oxfordshire; and will object that the Chiltern Hills are not high enough for clouds to rest upon their top, much less upon their breast. But he has left out the pollard willows, says another censor, and the lines of pollard willow are the prominent feature in the valley of the Colne, even more so than the "hedgerow elms." Does the line "Walk the studious cloister's pale," *mean* St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey? When these things can continue to be asked, it is hardly superfluous to continue to repeat, that truth of fact and poetical truth are two different things. Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a "descriptive poet," if indeed the phrase be not a self-contradiction.

In Milton, nature is not put forward as the poet's theme. His theme is man, in the two contrasted moods of joyous emotion, or grave reflection. The shifting scenery ministers to the varying mood. Thomson, in the *Seasons* (1726), sets himself to render natural phenomena as they truly are. He has left us a vivid presentation in gorgeous language of the naturalistic calendar of the changing year. Milton, in these two idylls, has recorded a day of twenty-four hours. But he has not registered the phenomena; he places us at the standpoint of the man before whom they deploy. And the man, joyous or melancholy, is not a bare spectator of them; he is the student, compounded of sensibility and intelligence, of whom we are not told that he saw so and so, or that he felt so, but with whom we are made copartners of his thoughts and feeling. Description melts into emotion, and contemplation bodies itself in imagery. All the

charm of rural life is there, but it is not tendered to us in the form of a landscape; the scenery is subordinated to the human figure in the centre.

These two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians.

In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high-water mark of English Poesy and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality* (1807), to be rising again towards the level of inspiration which it had once attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of the Miltonic genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance upon the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years which follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous, that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go," raises in us a thrill of

awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Æschylus's *Agamemnon*. For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circumstances of England in 1637. He must place himself as far as possible in the situation of a cotemporary. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words—a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas*, Milton's original picturesque vein is for the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurely indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody. Yet these opposites, instead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world—the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasure-loving court, and the new puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter—this conflict which was commencing in the social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas*.

> For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill.

Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder. Pass on-

ward a little, and you are in presence of the tremendous

Two-handed engine at the door,

the terror of which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very sure that the avenger is there, though we know not who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm which was to sweep away mask and revel and song, to inhibit the drama, and suppress poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's muse has sung in the tones of the age that is passing away; the poet is, except in his austere chastity, a cavalier. Though even in *L'Allegro* Dr. Johnson truly detects "some melancholy in his mirth." In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and then Milton leaves behind him for ever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

CHAPTER III.

JOURNEY TO ITALY.

Before 1632 Milton had begun to learn Italian. His mind, just then open on all sides to impressions from books, was peculiarly attracted by Italian poetry. The language grew to be loved for its own sake. Saturated as he was with Dante and Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto, the desire arose to let the ear drink in the music of Tuscan speech.

The "unhappy gift of beauty," which has attracted the spoiler of all ages to the Italian peninsula, has ever exerted, and still exerts, a magnetic force on every cultivated mind. Manifold are the sources of this fascination now. The scholar and the artist, the antiquarian and the historian, the architect and the lover of natural scenery, alike find here the amplest gratification of their tastes. This is so still; but in the sixteenth century the Italian cities were the only homes of an ancient and decaying civilization. Not insensible to other impressions, it was specially the desire of social converse with the living poets and men of taste—a feeble generation, but one still nourishing the traditions of the great poetic age—which drew Milton across the Alps.

In April, 1637, Milton's mother had died; but his

younger brother, Christopher, had come to live, with his wife, in the paternal home at Horton. Milton, the father, was not unwilling that his son should have his foreign tour, as a part of that elaborate education by which he was qualifying himself for his doubtful vocation. The cost was not to stand in the way, considerable as it must have been. Howell's estimate, in his *Instructions for Forreine Travel*, 1642, was 300*l.* a year for the tourist himself, and 50*l.* for his man, a sum equal to about 1000*l.* at present.

Among the letters of introduction with which Milton provided himself, one was from the aged Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton, in Milton's immediate neighbourhood. Sir Henry, who had lived a long time in Italy, impressed upon his young friend the importance of discretion on the point of religion, and told him the story which he always told to travellers who asked his advice. "At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipioni, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times. . . . . At my departure for Rome I had won confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself securely there, without offence of others, or of mine own conscience. 'Signor Arrigo mio,' says he, '*pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto* (thoughts close, countenance open) will go safely over the whole world.'" Though the intensity of the Catholic reaction had somewhat relaxed in Italy, the deportment of a Protestant in the countries which were terrorised by the Inquisition was a matter which demanded much circumspection. Sir H. Wotton spoke from his own experience of far more rigorous times than those of the Barberini Pope. But he may have noticed, even in his brief acquaintance with Milton, a fearless presumption of speech which was just what was most likely to bring

him into trouble. The event proved that the hint was not misplaced. For at Rome itself, in the very lion's den, nothing could content the young zealot but to stand up for his Protestant creed. Milton would not do as Peter Heylin did, who, when asked as to his religion, replied that he was a Catholic, which, in a Laudian, was but a natural equivoque. Milton was resolute in his religion at Rome, so much so that many were deterred from showing him the civilities they were prepared to offer. His rule, he says, was "not of my own accord to introduce in those places conversation about religion, but, if interrogated respecting the faith, then, whatsoever I should suffer, to dissemble nothing. What I was, if any one asked, I concealed from no one; if any one in the very city of the Pope attacked the orthodox religion, I defended it most freely." Beyond the statement that the English Jesuits were indignant, we hear of no evil consequences of this imprudence. Perhaps the Jesuits saw that Milton was of the stuff that would welcome martyrdom, and were sick of the affair of Galileo, which had terribly damaged the pretensions of their church.

Milton arrived in Paris April or May, 1638. He received civilities from the English ambassador, Lord Scudamore, who at his request gave him an introduction to Grotius. Grotius, says Phillips, "took Milton's visit kindly, and gave him entertainment suitable to his worth, and the high commendations he had heard of him." We have no other record of his stay of many days in Paris, though A. Wood supposes that "the manners and graces of that place were not agreeable to his mind." It was August before he reached Florence, by way of Nice and Genoa, and in Florence he spent the two months which we now consider the most impossible there, the months

of August and September. Nor did he find, as he would find now, the city deserted by the natives. We hear nothing of Milton's impressions of the place, but of the men whom he met there he retained always a lively and affectionate remembrance. The learned and polite Florentines had not fled to the hills from the stifling heat and blinding glare of the Lung' Arno, but seem to have carried on their literary meetings in defiance of climate. This was the age of academies—an institution, Milton says, "of most praiseworthy effect, both for the cultivation of polite letters and the keeping up of friendships." Florence had five or six such societies, the Florentine, the Della Crusca, the Svogliati, the Apotisti, &c. It is easy, and usual in our day, to speak contemptuously of the literary tone of these academies, fostering, as they did, an amiable and garrulous intercourse of reciprocal compliment, and to contrast them unfavourably with our societies for severe research. They were at least evidence of culture, and served to keep alive the traditions of the more masculine Medicean age. And that the members of these associations were not unaware of their own degeneracy and of its cause, we learn from Milton himself. For as soon as they found that they were safe with the young Briton, they disclosed their own bitter hatred of the church's yoke which they had to bear. "I have sate among their learned men," Milton wrote in 1644, "and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought, that this was it which had dampt the glory of Italian wits, that nothing had been written there now these many years but flattery and fustian." Milton was introduced

at the meetings of their academies; his presence is recorded on two occasions, of which the latest is the 16th September at the Svogliati. He paid his scot by reciting from memory some of his youthful Latin verses, hexameters, "molto erudite," says the minute-book of the sitting, and others, which "I shifted, in the scarcity of books and conveniences, to patch up." He obtained much credit by these exercises, which, indeed, deserved it by comparison. He ventured upon the perilous experiment of offering some compositions in Italian, which the fastidious Tuscan ear at least professed to include in those "encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps."

The author of *Lycidas* cannot but have been quite aware of the small poetical merit of such an ode as that which was addressed to him by Francini. In this ode Milton is the swan of Thames—"Thames, which, owing to thee, rivals Bœotian Permessus;" and so forth. But there is a genuine feeling, an ungrudging warmth of sympathetic recognition underlying the trite and tumid panegyric. And Milton may have yielded to the not unnatural impulse of showing his countrymen, that though not a prophet in boorish and fanatical England, he had found recognition in the home of letters and arts. Upon us is forced, by this their different reception of Milton, the contrast between the two countries, Italy and England, in the middle of the seventeenth century. The rude north, whose civilisation was all to come, concentrating all its intelligence in a violent effort to work off the ecclesiastical poison from its system, is brought into sharp contrast with the sweet south, whose civilisation is behind it, and whose intellect, after a severe struggle, has succumbed to the material force and organisation of the church.

As soon as the season allowed of it, Milton set forward to Rome, taking what was then the usual way by Siena. At Rome he spent two months, occupying himself partly with seeing the antiquities, and partly with cultivating the acquaintance of natives, and some of the many foreigners resident in the eternal city. But though he received much civility, we do not find that he met with the peculiar sympathy which endeared to him his Tuscan friends. His chief ally was the German, Lucas Holstenius, a native of Hamburg, who had abjured Protestantism to become librarian of the Vatican. Holstenius had resided three years in Oxford, and considered himself bound to repay to the English scholar some of the attentions he had received himself. Through Holstenius Milton was presented to the nephew, Francesco Barberini, who was just then everything in Rome. It was at a concert at the Barberini palace that Milton heard Leonora Baroni sing. His three Latin epigrams addressed to this lady, the first singer of Italy, or of the world at that time, testify to the enthusiasm she excited in the musical soul of Milton.

Nor are these three epigrams the only homage which Milton paid to Italian beauty. The susceptible poet, who in the sunless north would fain have "sported with the tangles of Neæra's hair," could not behold Neæra herself and the flashing splendour of her eye, unmoved. Milton proclaims (*Defensio Secunda*) that in all his foreign tour he had lived clear from all that is disgraceful. But the pudicity of his behaviour and language covers a soul tremulous with emotion, whose passion was intensified by the discipline of a chaste intention. Five Italian pieces among his poems are to the address of another lady, whose "majestic movements and love-darting dark brow" had subdued him. The charm lay in the novelty of this style

of beauty to one who came from the land of the "vermeil-tinctur'd cheek" (*Comus*) and the "golden nets of hair" (*El.* i. 60). No clue has been discovered to the name of this divinity, or to the occasion on which Milton saw her.

Of Milton's impression of Rome there is no record. There are no traces of special observation in his poetry. The description of the city in *Paradise Regained* (iv. 32) has nothing characteristic, and could have been written by one who had never seen it, and by many as well as by Milton. We get one glimpse of him by aid of the register of the English College, as dining there at a "sumptuous entertainment" on 30th October, when he met Nicholas Carey, brother of Lord Falkland. In spite of Sir Henry Wotton's caution, his resoluteness, as A. Wood calls it, in his religion, besides making the English Jesuits indignant, caused others, not Jesuits, to withhold civilities. Milton only tells us himself that the antiquities detained him in Rome about two months.

At the end of November he went on to Naples. On the road he fell in with an Eremite friar, who gave him an introduction to the one man in Naples whom it was important he should know, Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa. The marquis, now seventy-eight, had been for two generations the Mæcenas of letters in Southern Italy. He had sheltered Tasso in the former generation, and Marini in the latter. It was the singular privilege of his old age that he should now entertain a third poet, greater than either. In spite of his years, he was able to act as cicerone to the young Englishman over the scenes which he himself, in his *Life of Tasso*, has described with the enthusiasm of a poet. But even the high-souled Manso quailed before the terrors of the In-

quisition, and apologised to Milton for not having shown him greater attention, because he would not be more circumspect in the matter of religion. Milton's Italian journey brings out the two conflicting strains of feeling which were uttered together in *Lycidas*, the poet's impressibility by nature, the freeman's indignation at clerical domination.

The time was now at hand when the latter passion, the noble rage of freedom, was to suppress the more delicate flower of poetic imagination. Milton's original scheme had included Sicily and Greece. The serious aspect of affairs at home compelled him to renounce his project. "I considered it dishonourable to be enjoying myself at my ease in foreign lands, while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom." He retraced his steps leisurely enough, however, making a halt of two months in Rome, and again one of two months in Florence. We find him mentioned in the minutes of the academy of the Svogliati as having been present at three of their weekly meetings, on the 17th, 24th, and 31st March. But the most noteworthy incident of his second Florentine residence is his interview with Galileo. He had been unable to see the veteran martyr of science on his first visit. For though Galileo was at that time living within the walls, he was kept a close prisoner by the Inquisition, and not allowed either to set foot outside his own door, or to receive visits from non-Catholics. In the spring of 1639, however, he was allowed to go back to his villa at Gioiello, near Arcetri, and Milton obtained admission to him, old, frail, and blind, but in full possession of his mental faculty. There is observable in Milton, as Mr. Masson suggests, a prophetic fascination of the fancy on the subject of blind-

ness. And the deep impression left by this sight of "the Tuscan artist" is evidenced by the feeling with which Galileo's name and achievement are imbedded in *Paradise Lost*.

From Florence, Milton crossed the Apennines by Bologna and Ferrara to Venice. From this port he shipped for England the books he had collected during his tour, books curious and rare as they seemed to Phillips, and among them a chest or two of choice music books. The month of April was spent at Venice, and bidding farewell to the beloved land he would never visit again, Milton passed the Alps to Geneva.

No Englishman's foreign pilgrimage was complete without touching at this marvellous capital of the reformed faith, which with almost no resources had successfully braved the whole might of the Catholic reaction. The only record of Milton's stay at Geneva is the album of a Neapolitan refugee, to which Milton contributed his autograph, under date 10th June, 1639, with the following quotation :—

> If virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her.
>
> (From *Comus*).
>
> Cœlum non animum muto, dum trans mare curro.
>
> (From *Horace*.)

But it is probable that he was a guest in the house of one of the leading pastors, Giovanni Diodati, whose nephew Charles, a physician commencing practice in London, was Milton's bosom friend. Here Milton first heard of the death, in the previous August, of that friend. It was a heavy blow to him, for one of the chief pleasures of being at home again would have been to pour

into a sympathetic Italian ear the story of his adventures. The sadness of the homeward journey from Geneva is recorded for us in the *Epitaphium Damonis*. This piece is an elegy to the memory of Charles Diodati. It unfortunately differs from the elegy on King in being written in Latin, and is thus inaccessible to uneducated readers. As to such readers the topic of Milton's Latin poetry is necessarily an ungrateful subject, I will dismiss it here with one remark. Milton's Latin verses are distinguished from most Neo-latin verse by being a vehicle of real emotion. His technical skill is said to have been surpassed by others; but that in which he stands alone is, that in these exercises of imitative art he is able to remain himself, and to give utterance to genuine passion. Artificial Arcadianism is as much the frame-work of the elegy on Diodati as it is of *Lycidas*. We have Daphnis and Bion, Tityrus and Amyntas for characters, Sicilian valleys for scenery, while Pan, Pales, and the Fauns represent the supernatural. The shepherds defend their flocks from wolves and lions. But this factitious bucolicism is pervaded by a pathos, which, like volcanic heat, has fused into a new compound the dilapidated débris of the Theocritean world. And in the Latin elegy there is more tenderness than in the English. Charles Diodati was much nearer to Milton than had been Edward King. The sorrow in *Lycidas* is not so much personal as it is the regret of the society of Christ's. King had only been known to Milton as one of the students of the same college; Diodati was the associate of his choice in riper manhood.

The *Epitaphium Damonis* is further memorable as Milton's last attempt in serious Latin verse. He discovered in this experiment that Latin was not an adequate

vehicle of the feeling he desired to give vent to. In the concluding lines he takes a formal farewell of the Latian muse, and announces his purpose of adopting henceforth the "harsh and grating Brittonic idiom" (*Brittonicum stridens*).

SECOND PERIOD. 1640—1660.

CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATIONAL THEORY—TEACHING.

MILTON was back in England in August, 1639. He had been absent a year and three months, during which space of time the aspect of public affairs, which had been perplexed and gloomy when he left, had been growing still more ominous of a coming storm. The issues of the controversy were so pervasive, that it was almost impossible for any educated man who understood them not to range himself on a side. Yet Milton, though he had broken off his projected tour in consequence, did not rush into the fray on his return. He resumed his retired and studious life, "with no small delight, cheerfully leaving," as he says, "the event of public affairs first to God, and then to those to whom the people had committed that task."

He did not return to Horton, but took lodgings in London, in the house of Russel a tailor, in St. Bride's churchyard, at the city end of Fleet-street, on the site of what is now Farringdon-street. There is no attempt on the part of Milton to take up a profession, not even for the sake of appearances. The elder Milton was content to provide the son, of whom he was proud, with the means of prosecuting his eccentric scheme of life, to continue,

namely, to prepare himself for some great work, nature unknown.

For a young man of simple habits and studious life a little suffices. The chief want is books, and of these, for Milton's style of reading, select rather than copious, a large collection is superfluous. There were in 1640 no public libraries in London, and a scholar had to find his own store of books or to borrow from his friends. Milton never can have possessed a large library. At Horton he may have used Kederminster's bequest to Langley Church. Still, with his Italian acquisitions, added to the books that he already possessed, he soon found a lodging too narrow for his accommodation, and removed to a house of his own, "a pretty garden-house, in Aldersgate, at the end of an entry." Aldersgate was outside the city walls, on the verge of the open country of Islington, and was a genteel though not a fashionable quarter. There were few streets in London, says Phillips, more free from noise.

He had taken in hand the education of his two nephews, John and Edward Phillips, sons of his only sister Anne. Anne was a few years older than her brother John. Her first husband, Edward Phillips, had died in 1631, and the widow had given her two sons a stepfather in one Thomas Agar, who was in the Clerk of the Crown's office. Milton, on settling in London in 1639, had at once taken his younger nephew John to live with him. When, in 1640, he removed to Aldersgate, the elder, Edward, also came under his roof.

If it was affection for his sister which first moved Milton to undertake the tuition of her sons, he soon developed a taste for the occupation. In 1643 he began to receive into his house other pupils, but only, says Phillips (who is solicitous that his uncle should not be

thought to have kept a school), "the sons of some gentlemen that were his intimate friends." He threw into his lessons the same energy which he carried into everything else. In his eagerness to find a place for everything that could be learnt, there could have been few hours in the day which were not invaded by teaching. He had exchanged the contemplative leisure of Horton for a busy life, in which no hour but had its calls. Even on Sundays there were lessons in the Greek Testament and dictations of a system of Divinity in Latin. His pamphlets of this period betray, in their want of measure and equilibrium, even in their heated style and passion-flushed language, the life at high pressure which their author was leading.

We have no account of Milton's method of teaching from any competent pupil. Edward Phillips was an amiable and upright man, who earned his living respectably by tuition and the compilation of books. He held his uncle's memory in great veneration. But when he comes to describe the education he received at his uncle's hands, the only characteristic on which he dwells is that of quantity. Phillips's account is, however, supplemented for us by Milton's written theory. His *Tractate of Education to Master Samuel Hartlib* is probably known even to those who have never looked at anything else of Milton's in prose.

Of all the practical arts, that of education seems the most cumbrous in its method, and to be productive of the smallest results with the most lavish expenditure of means. Hence the subject of education is one which is always luring on the innovator and the theorist. Every one, as he grows up, becomes aware of time lost, and effort misapplied, in his own case. It is not unnatural to desire to save our children from a like waste of power. And in a

time such as was that of Milton's youth, when all traditions were being questioned, and all institutions were to be remodelled, it was certain that the school would be among the earliest objects to attract an experimental reformer. Among the advanced minds of the time there had grown up a deep dissatisfaction with the received methods of our schools, and more especially of our universities. The great instaurator of all knowledge, Bacon, in preaching the necessity of altering the whole method of knowing, included as matter of course the method of teaching to know.

The man who carried over the Baconian aspiration into education was Comenius (d. 1670). A projector and enthusiast, Comenius desired, like Bacon, an entirely new intellectual era. With Bacon's intellectual ambition, but without Bacon's capacity, Comenius proposed to revolutionise all knowledge, and to make complete wisdom accessible to all, in a brief space of time, and with a minimum of labour. Language only as an instrument, not as an end in itself; many living languages, instead of the one dead language of the old school; a knowledge of things, instead of words; the free use of our eyes and ears upon the nature that surrounds us; intelligent apprehension, instead of loading the memory—all these doctrines, afterwards inherited by the party of rational reform, were first promulgated in Europe by the numerous pamphlets—some ninety have been reckoned up—of this Teuto-Slav, Comenius.

Comenius had as the champion of his views in England Samuel Hartlib, a Dantziger by origin, settled in London since 1628. Hartlib had even less of real science than Comenius, but he was equally possessed by the Baconian ideal of a new heaven and a new earth of knowledge.

Not himself a discoverer in any branch, he was unceasingly occupied in communicating the discoveries and inventions of others. He had an ear for every novelty of whatever kind, interesting himself in social, religious, philanthropic schemes, as well as in experiments in the arts. A sanguine universality of benevolence pervaded that generation of ardent souls, akin only in their common anticipation of an unknown Utopia. A secret was within the reach of human ingenuity which would make all mankind happy. But there were two directions more especially in which Hartlib's zeal without knowledge abounded. These were a grand scheme for the union of Protestant Christendom, and his propagand of Comenius's school-reform.

For the first of these projects it was not likely that Hartlib would gain a proselyte in Milton, who had at one-and-twenty judged Anglican orders a servitude, and was already chafing against the restraints of Presbytery. But on his other hobby, that of school-reform, Milton was not only sympathetic, but when Hartlib came to talk with him, he found that most or all of Comenius's ideas had already independently presented themselves to the reflection or experience of the Englishman. At Hartlib's request Milton consented to put down his thoughts on paper, and even to print them in a quarto pamphlet of eight pages, entitled, *Of Education: to Master Samuel Hartlib.*

This tract, often reproduced and regarded, along with one of Locke's, as a substantial contribution to the subject, must often have grievously disappointed those who have eagerly consulted it for practical hints or guidance of any kind. Its interest is wholly biographical. It cannot be regarded as a valuable contribution to educational theory, but it is strongly marked with the Miltonic indi-

viduality. We find in it the same lofty conception of the aim which Milton carried into everything he attempted; the same disdain of the beaten routine, and proud reliance upon his own resources. He had given vent elsewhere to his discontent with the system of Cambridge, "which, as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now (1642) much less." In the letter to Hartlib he denounces with equal fierceness the schools and "the many mistakes which have made learning generally so unpleasing and so unsuccessful." The alumni of the universities carry away with them a hatred and contempt for learning, and sink into "ignorantly zealous" clergymen, or mercenary lawyers, while the men of fortune betake themselves to feasts and jollity. These last, Milton thinks, are the best of the three classes.

All these moral shipwrecks are the consequence, according to Milton, of bad education. It is in our power to avert them by a reform of schools. But the measures of reform, when produced, are ludicrously incommensurable with the evils to be remedied. I do not trouble the reader with the proposals; they are a form of the well-known mistake of regarding education as merely the communication of useful knowledge. The doctrine as propounded in the *Tractate* is complicated by the further difficulty, that the knowledge is to be gathered out of Greek and Latin books. This doctrine is advocated by Milton with the ardour of his own lofty enthusiasm. In virtue of the grandeur of zeal which inspires them, these pages, which are in substance nothing more than the now familiar omniscient examiner's programme, retain a place as one of our classics. The fine definition of education here given has never been improved upon: "I call a

complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." This is the true Milton. When he offers, in another page, as an equivalent definition of the true end of learning, "to repair the ruin of our first parents by regaining to know God aright," we have the theological Milton, and what he took on from the current language of his age.

Milton saw strongly, as many have done before and since, one weak point in the practice of schools, namely, the small result of much time. He fell into the natural error of the inexperienced teacher, that of supposing that the remedy was the ingestion of much and diversified intelligible matter. It requires much observation of young minds to discover that the rapid inculcation of unassimilated information stupefies the faculties instead of training them. Is it fanciful to think that in Edward Phillips, who was always employing his superficial pen upon topics with which he snatched a fugitive acquaintance, we have a concrete example of the natural result of the Miltonic system of instruction?

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE, AND PAMPHLETS ON DIVORCE.

We have seen that Milton turned back from his unaccomplished tour because he "deemed it disgraceful to be idling away his time abroad for his own gratification, while his countrymen were contending for their liberty." From these words biographers have inferred that he hurried home with the view of taking service in the Parliamentarian army. This interpretation of his words seems to receive confirmation from what Phillips thinks he had heard,—"I am much mistaken if there were not about this time a design in agitation of making him Adjutant-General in Sir William Waller's army." Phillips very likely thought that a recruit could enlist as an Adjutant-General, but it does not appear from Milton's own words that he himself ever contemplated service in the field. The words "contending for liberty" (de libertate dimicarent) could not, as said of the winter 1638-39, mean anything more than the strife of party. And when war did break out, it must have been obvious to Milton that he could serve the cause better as a scholar than as a soldier.

That he never took service in the army is certain. If

there was a time when he should have been found in the ranks, it was on the 12th November, 1642, when every able-bodied citizen turned out to oppose the march of the king, who had advanced to Brentford. But we have the evidence of the sonnet—

Captain, or Colonel, or Knight in arms,

that Milton, on this occasion, stayed at home. He had, as he announced in February, 1642, "taken labour and intent study" to be his portion in this life. He did not contemplate enlisting his pen in the service of the Parliament, but the exaltation of his country's glory by the composition of some monument of the English language, as Dante or Tasso had done for Italian. But a project ambitious as this lay too far off to be put in execution as soon as thought of. The ultimate purpose had to give place to the immediate. One of these interludes, originating in Milton's personal relations, was his series of tracts on divorce.

In the early part of the summer of 1643, Milton took a sudden journey into the country, "nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was any more than a journey of recreation." He was absent about a month, and when he returned he brought back a wife with him. Nor was the bride alone. She was attended "by some few of her nearest relations," and there was feasting and celebration of the nuptials, in the house in Aldersgate-street.

The bride's name was Mary, eldest daughter of Richard Powell, Esq., of Forest Hill, J.P. for the county of Oxford. Forest Hill is a village and parish about five miles from Oxford on the Thame road, where Mr. Powell had a house

and a small estate of some 300*l.* a year, value of that day. Forest Hill was within the ancient royal forest of Shotover, of which Mr. Powell was lessee. The reader will remember that the poet's father was born at Stanton St. John, the adjoining parish to Forest Hill, and that Richard Milton, the grandfather, had been under-ranger of the royal forest. There had been many transactions between the Milton and the Powell families as far back as 1627. In paying a visit to that neighbourhood, Milton was both returning to the district which had been the home of all the Miltons, and renewing an old acquaintance with the Powell family. Mr. Powell, though in receipt of a fair income for a country gentleman 300*l.* a year of that day may be roughly valued at 1000*l.* of our day—and his wife had brought him 3000*l.*, could not live within his means. His children were numerous, and, belonging as he did to the cavalier party, his house was conducted with the careless hospitality of a royalist gentleman. Twenty years before he had begun borrowing, and among other persons had had recourse to the prosperous and saving scrivener of Bread-street. He was already mortgaged to the Miltons, father and sons, more deeply than his estate had any prospect of paying, which was perhaps the reason why he found no difficulty in promising a portion of 1000*l.* with his daughter. Milton, with a poet's want of caution, or indifference to money, and with a lofty masculine disregard of the temper and character of the girl he asked to share his life, came home with his bride in triumph, and held feasting in celebration of his hasty and ill considered choice. It was a beginning of sorrows to him. Hitherto, up to his thirty-fifth year, independent master of leisure and the delights of literature, his years had passed without a check or a shadow. From this day

forward domestic misery, the importunities of business, the clamour of controversy, crowned by the crushing calamity of blindness, were to be his portion for more than thirty years. Singular among poets in the serene fortune of the first half of life, in the second half his piteous fate was to rank in wretchedness with that of his masters, Dante or Tasso.

The biographer, acquainted with the event, has no difficulty in predicting it, and in saying at this point in his story, that Milton might have known better than, with his puritanical connections, to have taken to wife a daughter of a cavalier house, to have brought her from a roystering home, frequented by the dissolute officers of the Oxford garrison, to the spare diet and philosophical retirement of a recluse student, and to have looked for sympathy and response for his speculations from an uneducated and frivolous girl. Love has blinded, and will continue to blind, the wisest men to calculations as easy and as certain as these. And Milton, in whose soul Puritan austerity was as yet only contending with the more genial currents of humanity, had a far greater than average susceptibility to the charm of woman. Even at the later date of *Paradise Lost*, voluptuous thoughts, as Mr. Hallam has observed, are not uncongenial to him. And at an earlier age his poems, candidly pure from the lascivious inuendoes of his contemporaries, have preserved the record of the rapid impression of the momentary passage of beauty upon his susceptible mind. Once, at twenty, he was set all on flame by the casual meeting, in one of his walks in the suburbs of London, with a damsel whom he never saw again. Again, sonnets III. to V. tell how he fell before the new type of foreign beauty which crossed his path at Bologna. A similar

surprise of his fancy at the expense of his judgment seems to have happened on the present occasion of his visit to Shotover. There is no evidence that Mary Powell was handsome, and we may be sure that it would have been mentioned if she had been. But she had youth, and country freshness; her "unliveliness and natural sloth unfit for conversation" passed as "the bashful muteness of a virgin;" and if a doubt intruded that he was being too hasty, Milton may have thought that a girl of seventeen could be moulded at pleasure.

He was too soon undeceived. His dream of married happiness barely lasted out the honeymoon. He found that he had mated himself to a clod of earth, who not only was not now, but had not the capacity of becoming, a helpmeet for him. With Milton, as with the whole Calvinistic and Puritan Europe, woman was a creature of an inferior and subordinate class. Man was the final cause of God's creation, and woman was there to minister to this nobler being. In his dogmatic treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton formulated this sentiment in the thesis, borrowed from the schoolmen, that the soul was communicated "in semine patris." The cavalier section of society had inherited the sentiment of chivalry, and contrasted with the roundhead not more by its loyalty to the person of the prince, than by its recognition of the superior grace and refinement of womanhood. Even in the debased and degenerate epoch of court life which followed 1660, the forms and language of homage still preserved the tradition of a nobler scheme of manners. The Puritan had thrown off chivalry as being parcel of Catholicism, and had replaced it by the Hebrew ideal of the subjection and seclusion of woman. Milton, in whose mind the rigidity of Puritan doctrine was now contending

with the freer spirit of culture and romance, shows on the present occasion a like conflict of doctrine with sentiment. While he adopts the oriental hypothesis of woman for the sake of man, he modifies it by laying more stress upon mutual affection, the charities of home, and the intercommunion of intellectual and moral life, than upon that ministration of woman to the appetite and comforts of man, which makes up the whole of her functions in the Puritan apprehension. The failure in his own case to obtain this genial companionship of soul, which he calls "the gentlest end of marriage," is what gave the keenest edge to his disappointment in his matrimonial venture.

But however keenly he felt and regretted the precipitancy which had yoked him for life to "a mute and spiritless mate," the breach did not come from his side. The girl herself conceived an equal repugnance to the husband she had thoughtlessly accepted, probably on the strength of his good looks, which was all of Milton that she was capable of appreciating. A young bride, taken suddenly from the freedom of a jovial and an undisciplined home, rendered more lax by civil confusion and easy intercourse with the officers of the royalist garrison, and committed to the sole society of a stranger, and that stranger possessing the rights of a husband, and expecting much from all who lived with him, may not unnaturally have been seized with panic terror, and wished herself home again. The young Mrs. Milton not only wished it, but incited her family to write and beg that she might be allowed to go home to stay the remainder of the summer. The request to quit her husband at the end of the first month was so unreasonable, that the parents would hardly have made it if they had not suspected some pro-

found cause of estrangement. Nor could Milton have consented, as he did, to so extreme a remedy, unless he had felt that the case required no less, and that her mother's advice and influence were the most available means of awakening his wife to a sense of her duty. Milton's consent was therefore given. He may have thought it desirable she should go, and thus Mrs. Powell would not have been going very much beyond the truth when she pretended some years afterwards that her son-in-law had turned away his wife for a long space.

Mary Milton went to Forest Hill in July, but on the understanding that she was to come back at Michaelmas. When the appointed time came, she did not appear. Milton wrote for her to come. No answer. Several other letters met the same fate. At last he despatched a foot messenger to Forest Hill desiring her return. The messenger came back only to report that he had been "dismissed with some sort of contempt." It was evident that Mary Milton's family had espoused her cause as against her husband. Whatever may have been the secret motive of their conduct, they explained the quarrel politically, and began to repent, so Phillips thought, of having matched the eldest daughter of their house with a violent Presbyterian.

If Milton had "hasted too eagerly to light the nuptial torch," he had been equally ardent in his calculations of the domestic happiness upon which he was to enter. His poet's imagination had invested a dull and common girl with rare attributes moral and intellectual, and had pictured for him the state of matrimony as an earthly paradise, in which he was to be secure of a response of affection showing itself in a communion of intelligent interests. In proportion to the brilliancy of his ideal anticipation

was the fury of despair which came upon him when he found out his mistake. A common man, in a common age, would have vented his vexation upon the individual. Milton, living at a time when controversy turned away from details, and sought to dig down to the roots of every question, instead of urging the hardships of his own case, set to to consider the institution of marriage in itself. He published a pamphlet with the title, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, at first anonymously, but putting his name to a second edition, much enlarged. He further reinforced this argument in chief with three supplementary pamphlets, partly in answer to opponents and objectors; for there was no lack of opposition, indeed of outcry loud and fierce.

A biographer closely scans the pages of these pamphlets, not for the sake of their direct argument, but to see if he can extract from them any indirect hints of their author's personal relations. There is found in them no mention of Milton's individual case. Had we no other information, we should not be authorised to infer from them that the question of the marriage tie was more than an abstract question with the author.

But though all mention of his own case is studiously avoided by Milton, his pamphlet, when read by the light of Phillips's brief narrative, does seem to give some assistance in apprehending the circumstances of this obscure passage of the poet's life. The mystery has always been felt by the biographers, but has assumed a darker hue since the discovery by Mr. Masson of a copy of the first edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, with the written date of August 1. According to Phillips's narrative, the pamphlet was engendered by Milton's indignation at his wife's contemptuous treatment of him,

in refusing to keep the engagement to return at Michaelmas, and would therefore be composed in October and November, time enough to allow for the sale of the edition, and the preparation of the enlarged edition, which came out in February, 1644. But if the date "August 1" for the first edition be correct, we have to suppose that Milton was occupying himself with the composition of a vehement and impassioned argument in favour of divorce for incompatibility of temper, during the honeymoon! Such behaviour on Milton's part, he being thirty-five, towards a girl of seventeen, to whom he was bound to show all loving tenderness, is so horrible, that a suggestion has been made that there was a more adequate cause for his displeasure, a suggestion which Milton's biographer is bound to notice, even if he does not adopt it. The suggestion, which I believe was first made by a writer in the *Athenæum*, is that Milton's young wife refused him the consummation of the marriage. The supposition is founded upon a certain passage in Milton's pamphlet.

If the early date of the pamphlet be the true date; if the *Doctrine and Discipline* was in the hands of the public on August 1; if Milton was brooding over this seething agony of passion all through July, with the young bride, to whom he had been barely wedded a month, in the house where he was writing, then the only apology for this outrage upon the charities, not to say decencies, of home is that which is suggested by the passage referred to. Then the pamphlet, however imprudent, becomes pardonable. It is a passionate cry from the depths of a great despair; another evidence of the noble purity of a nature which refused to console itself as other men would have consoled themselves; a nature which, instead of an egotistical whine for its own deliverance, sets itself to

plead the common cause of man and of society. He gives no intimation of any individual interest, but his argument throughout glows with a white heat of concealed emotion, such as could only be stirred by the sting of some personal and present misery.

Notwithstanding the amount of free opinion abroad in England, or at least in London, at this date, Milton's divorce pamphlets created a sensation of that sort which Gibbon is fond of calling a scandal. A scandal, in this sense, must always arise in your own party; you cannot scandalise the enemy. And so it was now. The Episcopalians were rejoiced that Milton should ruin his credit with his own side by advocating a paradox. The Presbyterians hastened to disown a man who enabled their opponents to brand their religious scheme as the parent of moral heresies. For though church government and the English constitution in all its parts had begun to be open questions, speculation had not as yet attacked either of the two bases of society, property or the family. Loud was the outcry of the Philistines. There was no doubt that the rigid bonds of Presbyterian orthodoxy would not in any case have long held Milton. They were snapped at once by the publication of his opinions on divorce, and Milton is henceforward to be ranked among the most independent of the new party which shortly after this date began to be heard of under the name of Independents.

But the men who formed the nucleus of this new mode of thinking were as yet, in 1643, not consolidated into a sect, still less was their importance as the coming political party dreamt of. At present they were units, only drawn to each other by the sympathy of opinion. The contemptuous epithets, Anabaptist, Antinomian, &c., could be

levelled against them with fatal effect by every Philistine, and were freely used on this occasion against Milton. He says of himself that he now lived in a world of disesteem. Nor was there wanting, to complete his discomfiture, the practical parody of the doctrine of divorce. A Mistress Attaway, lacewoman in Bell-alley, and she-preacher in Coleman-street, had been reading Master Milton's book, and remembered that she had an unsanctified husband, who did not speak the language of Canaan. She further reflected that Mr. Attaway was not only unsanctified, but was also absent with the army, while William Jenney was on the spot, and, like herself, also a preacher. Could a "scandalised" Presbyterian help pointing the finger of triumphant scorn at such examples, the natural fruits of that mischievous book, *The Doctrine and Discipline?*

Beyond the stage of scandal and disesteem the matter did not proceed. In dedicating *The Doctrine and Discipline* to the Parliament, Milton had specially called on that assembly to legislate for the relief of men who were encumbered with unsuitable spouses. No notice was taken of this appeal, as there was far other work on hand, and no particular pressure from without in the direction of Milton's suit. Divorce for incompatibility of temper remained his private crotchet, or obtained converts only among his fellow-sufferers, who, however numerous, did not form a body important enough to enforce by clamour their demand for relief.

Milton was not very well pleased to find that the Parliament had no ear for the bitter cry of distress wrung from their ardent admirer and staunch adherent. Accordingly, in 1645, in dedicating the last of the divorce pamphlets, which he entitled *Tetrachordon*, to the Parliament,

he concluded with a threat, "If the law make not a timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of the consequences."

This threat he was prepared to put in execution, and did, in 1645, as Phillips tells us, contemplate a union, which could not have been a marriage, with another woman. He was able at this time to find some part of that solace of conversation which his wife failed to give him, among his female acquaintance. Especially we find him at home in the house of one of the Parliamentary women, the Lady Margaret Ley, a lady "of great wit and ingenuity," the "honoured Margaret" of Sonnet x. But the Lady Margaret was a married woman, being the wife of a Captain Hobson, a "very accomplished gentleman," of the Isle of Wight. The young lady who was the object of his attentions, and who, if she were the "virtuous young lady" of Sonnet IX., was "in the prime of earliest youth," was a daughter of a Dr. Davis, of whom nothing else is now known. She is described by Phillips, who may have seen her, as a very handsome and witty gentlewoman. Though Milton was ready to brave public opinion, Miss Davis was not. And so the suit hung, when all schemes of the kind were put an end to by the unexpected submission of Mary Powell.

Since October, 1643, when Milton's messenger had been dismissed from Forest Hill, the face of the civil struggle was changed. The Presbyterian army had been replaced by that of the Independents, and the immediate consequence had been the decline of the royal cause, consummated by its total ruin on the day of Naseby, in June, 1645. Oxford was closely invested, Forest Hill occupied by the besiegers, and the Powell family compelled to take refuge within the lines of the city. Financial bankruptcy, too,

had overtaken the Powells. These influences, rather than any rumours which may have reached them of Milton's designs in regard to Miss Davis, wrought a change in the views of the Powell family. By the triumph of the Independents Mr. Milton was become a man of consideration, and might be useful as a protector. They concluded that the best thing they could do was to seek a reconciliation. There were not wanting friends of Milton's also, some perhaps divining his secret discontent, who thought that such reconciliation would be better for him too, than perilling his happiness upon the experiment of an illegal connexion. A conspiracy of the friends of both parties contrived to introduce Mary Powell into a house where Milton often visited in St. Martin's-le-Grand. She was secreted in an adjoining room, on an occasion when Milton was known to be coming, and he was surprised by seeing her suddenly brought in, throw herself on her knees, and ask to be forgiven. The poor young thing, now two years older and wiser, but still only nineteen, pleaded, truly or falsely, that her mother "had been all along the chief promoter of her frowardness." Milton, with a "noble leonine clemency" which became him, cared not for excuses for the past. It was enough that she was come back, and was willing to live with him as his wife. He received her at once, and not only her, but on the surrender of Oxford, in June, 1646, and the sequestration of Forest Hill, took in the whole family of Powells, including the mother-in-law, whose influence with her daughter might even again trouble his peace.

It is impossible not to see that Milton had this impressive scene, enacted in St. Martin's-le-Grand in 1645, before his mind, when he wrote, twenty years afterwards, the lines in *Paradise Lost*, x. 937 :—

. . . Eve, with tears that ceas'd not flowing
And tresses all disorder'd, at his feet
Fell humble, and embracing them, besought
His peace . .
. . . Her lowly plight
Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault
Acknowledg'd and deplor'd, in Adam wrought
Commiseration; soon his heart relented
Tow'rds her, his life so late and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress!
Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking,
* * * * *
At once disarm'd, his anger all he lost.

The garden-house in Aldersgate-street had before been found too small for the pupils who were being now pressed upon Milton. It was to a larger house in Barbican, a side street leading out of Aldersgate, that he brought the Powells and Mary Milton. Milton probably abated his exactions on the point of companionship, and learned to be content with her acquiescence in the duties of a wife. In July, 1646, she became a mother, and bore in all four children. Of these, three, all daughters, lived to grow up. Mary Milton herself died in giving birth to the fourth child in the summer of 1652. She was only twenty-six, and had been married to Milton nine years.

CHAPTER VI.

PAMPHLETS.

We have now seen Milton engaged in teaching and writing on education, involved in domestic unhappiness, and speculating on the obligations of marriage. But neither of these topics formed the principal occupation of his mind during these years. He had renounced a cherished scheme of travel because his countrymen were engaged at home in contending for their liberties, and it could not but be that the gradually intensified stages of that struggle engrossed his interest, and claimed his participation.

So imperative did he regard this claim that he allowed it to override the purposed dedication of his life to poetry. Not indeed for ever and aye, but for a time. As he had renounced Greece, the Ægean Isles, Thebes, and the East for the fight for freedom, so now to the same cause he postponed the composition of his epic of Arthurian romance, or whatever his mind "in the spacious circuits of her musing proposed to herself of highest hope and hardest attempting." No doubt at first, in thus deferring the work of his life, he thought the delay would be for a brief space. He did not foresee that having once taken an oar, he would be chained to it for more than twenty

years, and that he would finally owe his release to the ruin of the cause he had served. But for the Restoration and the overthrow of the Puritans, we should never have had the great Puritan epic.

The period then of his political activity is to be regarded as an episode in the life of the poet Milton. It is indeed an episode which fills twenty years, and those the most vigorous years of manhood, from his thirty-second to his fifty-second year. He himself was conscious of the sacrifice he was making, and apologises to the public for thus defrauding them of the better work which he stood pledged to execute. As he puts it, there was no choice for him. He could not help himself, at this critical juncture, "when the Church of God was at the foot of her insulting enemies;" he would never have ceased to reproach himself, if he had refused to employ the fruits of his studies in her behalf. He saw also that a generation inflamed by the passions of conflict, and looking in breathless suspense for the issue of battles, was not in a mood to attend to poetry. Nor, indeed, was he ready to write, "not having yet (this is in 1642) completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies."

But though he is drawn into the strife against his will, and in defiance of his genius, when he is in it, he throws into it the whole vehemence of his nature. The pamphlet period, I have said, is an episode in the life of the poet. But it is a genuine part of Milton's life. However his ambition may have been set upon an epic crown, his zeal for what he calls the church was an equal passion, nay had, in his judgment, a paramount claim upon him. He is a zealot among the zealots; his cause is the cause of God; and the sword of the Independents is the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. He does not refute

opponents, but curses enemies. Yet his rage, even when most delirious, is always a Miltonic rage; it is grand, sublime, terrible! Mingled with the scurrilities of the theological brawl are passages of the noblest English ever written. Hartley Coleridge explains the dulness of the wit-combats in Shakspeare and Jonson, on the ground that repartee is the accomplishment of lighter thinkers and a less earnest age. So of Milton's pamphlets it must be said that he was not fencing for pastime, but fighting for all he held most worthy. He had to think only of making his blows tell. When a battle is raging, and my friends are sorely pressed, am I not to help because good manners forbid the shedding of blood?

No good man can, with impunity, addict himself to party. And the best men will suffer most, because their conviction of the goodness of their cause is deeper. But when one with the sensibility of a poet throws himself into the excitements of a struggle, he is certain to lose his balance. The endowment of feeling and imagination which qualifies him to be the ideal interpreter of life, unfits him for participation in that real life, through the manœuvres and compromises of which reason is the only guide, and where imagination is as much misplaced as it would be in a game of chess. "The ennobling difference between one man and another is that one feels more than another." Milton's capacity of emotion, when once he became champion of a cause, could not be contained within the bounds of ordinary speech. It breaks into ferocious reprobation, into terrific blasts of vituperation, beneath which the very language creaks, as the timbers of a ship in a storm. Corruptio optimi pessima. The archangel is recognisable by the energy of his malice. Were all those accomplishments, those many studious

years hiving wisdom, the knowledge of all the tongues, the command of all the thoughts of all the ages, and that wealth of English expression—were all these acquirements only of use, that their possessor might vie in defamation with an Edwards or a Du Moulin?

For it should be noted that these pamphlets, now only serving as a record of the prostitution of genius to political party, were, at the time at which they appeared, of no use to the cause in which they were written. Writers, with a professional tendency to magnify their office, have always been given to exaggerate the effect of printed words. There are examples of thought having been influenced by books. But such books have been scientific, not rhetorical. Milton's pamphlets are not works of speculation, or philosophy, or learning, or solid reasoning on facts. They are inflammatory appeals, addressed to the passions of the hour. He who was meditating the erection of an enduring creation, such as the world "would not willingly let die," was content to occupy himself with the most ephemeral of all hackwork. His own polemical writings may be justly described in the words he himself uses of a book by one of his opponents, as calculated "to gain a short, contemptible, and soon-fading reward, not to stir the constancy and solid firmness of any wise man . . . . but to catch the worthless approbation of an inconstant, irrational, and image-doting rabble."

It would have been not unnatural that the public school and university man, the admirer of Shakspeare and the old romances, the pet of Italian academies, the poet-scholar, himself the author of two Masks, who was nursing his wings for a new flight into the realms of verse, should have sided with the cavaliers against the Puritans, with the party of culture and the humanities

against the party which shut up the theatres and despised profane learning. But we have seen that there was another side to Milton's mind. This may be spoken of as his other self, the Puritan self, and regarded as in internal conflict with the poet's self. His twenty years' pamphlet warfare may be presented by his biographer as the expression of the Puritanic Milton, who shall have been driven back upon his suppressed instincts as a poet by the ruin of his political hopes. This chart of Milton's life is at once simple and true. But like all physiological diagrams it falls short of the subtlety and complexity of human character. A study of the pamphlets will show that the poet is all there, indeed only too openly for influence on opinion, and that the blighted hope of the patriot lends a secret pathos to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

This other element in Milton is not accurately named Puritanism. Even the term republicanism is a coarse and conventional description of that sentiment which dominated his whole being, and which is the inspiration at once of his poetry and of his prose. To give a name to this sentiment, I must call it the love of liberty. It was an aspiration at once real and vague, after a new order of things, an order in which the old injustices and oppressions should cease; after a new Jerusalem, a millennium, a Utopia, an Oceana. Its aim was to realise in political institutions that great instauration of which Bacon dreamed in the world of intelligence. It was much more negative than affirmative, and knew better, as we all do, how good was hindered than how it should be promoted. "I did but prompt the age to *quit their clogs*." Milton embodied, more perfectly than any of his cotemporaries, this spirit of the age. It is the ardent aspiration after the pure and noble life, the aspiration which stamps every line he

wrote, verse or prose, with a dignity as of an heroic age. This gives consistency to all his utterances. The doctrinaire republican of to-day cannot understand how the man who approved the execution of the would-be despot Charles Stuart, should have been the hearty supporter of the real autocrat Oliver Cromwell. Milton was not the slave of a name. He cared not for the word republic, so as it was well with the commonwealth. Parliaments or single rulers, he knew, are but means to an end; if that end was obtained, no matter if the constitutional guarantees exist or not. Many of Milton's pamphlets are certainly party pleadings, choleric, one-sided, personal. But through them all runs the one redeeming characteristic—that they are all written on the side of liberty. He defended religious liberty against the prelates, civil liberty against the crown, the liberty of the press against the executive, liberty of conscience against the Presbyterians, and domestic liberty against the tyranny of canon law. Milton's pamphlets might have been stamped with the motto which Selden inscribed (in Greek) in all his books, "Liberty before everything."

One virtue these pamphlets possess, the virtue of style. They are monuments of our language so remarkable that Milton's prose works must always be resorted to by students, as long as English remains a medium of ideas. Yet even on the score of style, Milton's prose is subject to serious deductions. His negligence is such as to amount to an absence of construction. He who, in his verse, trained the sentence with delicate sensibility to follow his guiding hand into exquisite syntax, seems in his prose writing to abandon his meaning to shift for itself. Here Milton compares disadvantageously with Hooker. Hooker's elaborate sentence, like the sentence

of Demosthenes, is composed of parts so hinged, of clauses so subordinated to the main thought, that we foresee the end from the beginning, and close the period with a sense of perfect roundness and totality. Milton does not seem to have any notion of what a period means. He begins anywhere, and leaves off, not when the sense closes, but when he is out of breath. We might have thought this pell-mell huddle of his words was explained, if not excused, by the exigencies of the party pamphlet, which cannot wait. But the same asyntactic disorder is equally found in the *History of Britain*, which he had in hand for forty years. Nor is it only the Miltonic sentence which is incoherent; the whole arrangement of his topics is equally loose, disjointed, and desultory. His inspiration comes from impulse. Had he stayed to chastise his emotional writing by reason and the laws of logic, he would have deprived himself of the sources of his strength.

These serious faults are balanced by virtues of another kind. Putting Bacon aside, the condensed force and poignant brevity of whose aphoristic wisdom has no parallel in English, there is no other prosaist who possesses anything like Milton's command over the resources of our language. Milton cannot match the musical harmony and exactly balanced periods of his predecessor Hooker. He is without the power of varied illustration, and accumulation of ornamental circumstance, possessed by his contemporary, Jeremy Taylor (1613—1667). But neither of these great writers impresses the reader with a sense of unlimited power such as we feel to reside in Milton. Vast as is the wealth of magnificent words which he flings with both hands carelessly upon the page, we feel that there is still much more in reserve.

The critics have observed (Collier's *Poetical Decameron*)

that as Milton advanced in life he gradually disused the compound words he had been in the habit of making for himself. However this may be, his words are the words of one who made a study of the language, as a poet studies language, searching its capacities for the expression of surging emotion. Jeremy Taylor's prose is poetical prose. Milton's prose is not poetical prose, but a different thing, the prose of a poet; not like Taylor's, loaded with imagery on the outside; but coloured by imagination from within. Milton is the first English writer who, possessing in the ancient models a standard of the effect which could be produced by choice of words, set himself to the conscious study of our native tongue with a firm faith in its as yet undeveloped powers as an instrument of thought.

The words in Milton's poems have been counted, and it appears that he employs 8000, while Shakspeare's plays and poems yield about 15,000. From this it might be inferred that the Miltonic vocabulary is only half as rich as that of Shakspeare. But no inference can be founded upon the absolute number of words used by any writer. We must know, not the total of different words, but the *proportion* of different words to the whole of any writer's words. Now to furnish a list of 100 different words the English Bible requires 531 common words, Shakspeare 164, Milton 135 only. This computation is founded on the poems; it would be curious to have the same test tried upon the prose writings, though no such test can be as trustworthy as the educated ear of a listener to a continued reading.

It is no part of a succinct biography, such as the present, to furnish an account in detail of the various controversies of the time, as Milton engaged in them. The reader will

doubtless be content with the bare indication of the subjects on which he wrote. The whole number of Milton's political pamphlets is twenty-five. Of these, twenty-one are written in English, and four in Latin. Of the *Tractate of Education* and the four divorce pamphlets something has been already said. Of the remaining twenty, nine, or nearly half, relate to church government, or ecclesiastical affairs; eight treat of the various crises of the civil strife; and two are personal vindications of himself against one of his antagonists. There remains one tract of which the subject is of a more general and permanent nature, the best known of all the series, *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England.* The whole series of twenty-five extends over a period of somewhat less than twenty years; the earliest, viz., *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it*, having been published in 1641; the latest, entitled, *A ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth*, coming out in March, 1660, after the torrent of royalism had set in, which was to sweep away the men and the cause to which Milton had devoted himself. Milton's pen thus accompanied the whole of the Puritan revolution from the modest constitutional opposition in which it commenced, through its unexpected triumph, to its crushing overthrow by the royalist and clerical reaction.

The autumn of 1641 brought with it a sensible lull in the storm of revolutionary passion. Indeed, there began to appear all the symptoms of a reaction, and of the formation of a solid conservative party, likely to be strong enough to check, or even to suppress, the movement. The impulse seemed to have spent itself, and a desire for rest

from political agitation began to steal over the nation. Autumn and the harvest turn men's thoughts towards country occupations and sports. The King went off to Scotland in August; the Houses adjourned till the 20th October. The Scottish army had been paid off, and had repassed the border; the Scottish commissioners and preachers had left London.

It was a critical moment for the Puritan party. Some very considerable triumphs they had gained. The arch-enemy Strafford had been brought to the block; Laud was in the tower; the leading members of Convocation, bishops, deans, and archdeacons, had been heavily fined; the Star Chamber and the High Commission Court had been abolished; the Stannary and Forestal jurisdictions restrained. But the Puritan movement aimed at far more than this. It was not only that the root-and-branch men were pushing for a generally more levelling policy, but the whole Puritan party was committed to a struggle with the hierarchy of the Established Church. It was not so much that they demanded more and more reform, with the growing appetite of revolution, but that as long as bishops existed, nothing that had been wrested from them was secure. The Puritans could not exist in safety side by side with a church whose principle was that there was no church without the apostolic succession. The abolition of episcopacy and the substitution of the Presbyterian platform was, so it then seemed, a bare measure of necessary precaution, and not merely the extravagant demand of dissatisfied spirits. Add to this, that it was well understood by those near enough to the principal actors in the drama, that the concessions made by the Court had been easily made, because they could be taken back, when the time should come, with equal ease. Even the

most moderate men, who were satisfied with the amount of reform already obtained, must have trembled at its insecurity. The Puritan leaders must have viewed with dismay the tendency in the nation towards a reaction in favour of things as they were.

It was upon this condition of the public mind that Milton persistently poured pamphlet after pamphlet, successive vials of apocalyptic wrath. He exhausts all the resources of rhetoric, and plays upon every note in the gamut of public feeling, that he may rouse the apathetic, confirm the wavering, dumbfound the malignant; where there was zeal, to fan it into flame; where there was opposition, to cow and browbeat it by indignant scorn and terrific denunciation. The first of these manifestoes was (1) *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline*, of which I have already spoken. This was immediately followed by (2) *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy.* This tract was a reply, in form, to a publication of Archbishop Usher. It was about the end of May, 1641, that Usher had come forward on the breach with his *Judgment of Dr. Rainolds touching the Original of Episcopacy.* Rainolds, who had been President of Corpus (1598—1607), had belonged to the Puritan party in his day, had refused a bishopric, and was known, like Usher himself, to be little favourable to the exclusive claims of the high prelatists. He was thus an unexceptionable witness to adduce in favour of the apostolic origin of the distinction between bishop and presbyter. Usher, in editing Rainolds' opinions, had backed them up with all the additional citations which his vast reading could supply.

Milton could not speak with the weight that attached to Usher, the most learned Churchman of the age, who had spent eighteen years in going through a complete

course of fathers and councils. But, in the first paragraph of his answer, Milton adroitly puts the controversy upon a footing by which antiquarian research is put out of court. Episcopacy is either of human or divine origin. If of human origin, it may be either retained or abolished, as may be found expedient. If of divine appointment, it must be proved to be so out of Scripture. If this cannot be proved out of inspired Scripture, no accumulation of merely human assertion of the point can be of the least authority. Having thus shut out antiquity as evidence in the case, he proceeds nevertheless to examine his opponent's authorities, and sets them aside by a style of argument which has more of banter than of criticism.

One incident of this collision between Milton, young and unknown, and the venerable prelate, whom he was assaulting with the rude wantonness of untempered youth, deserves to be mentioned here. Usher had incautiously included the Ignatian epistles among his authorities. This laid the most learned man of the day at the mercy of an adversary of less reading than himself. Milton, who at least knew so much suspicion of the genuineness of these remains as Casaubon's *Exercitations on Baronius* and Vedelin's edition (Geneva, 1623) could suggest, pounced upon this critical flaw, and delightedly denounced in trenchant tones this "Perkin Warbeck of Ignatius," and the "supposititious offspring of some dozen epistles." This rude shock it was which set Usher upon a more careful examination of the Ignatian question. The result was his well-known edition of Ignatius, printed 1642, though not published till 1644, in which he acknowledged the total spuriousness of nine epistles, and the partial interpolation of the other six. I have not noticed in Usher's *Prolegomena* that he alludes to Milton's

onslaught. Nor, indeed, was he called upon to do so in a scientific investigation, as Milton had brought no contribution to the solution of the question beyond sound and fury.

Of Milton's third pamphlet, entitled (3) *Animadversions on the Remonstrants' defence against Smectymnuus*, it need only be said that it is a violent personal onfall upon Joseph Hall, bishop, first, of Exeter and afterwards of Norwich. The bishop, by descending into the arena of controversy, had deprived himself of the privilege which his literary eminence should have secured to him. But nothing can excuse or reconcile us to the indecent scurrility with which he is assailed in Milton's pages, which reflect more discredit on him who wrote them, than on him against whom they are written.

The fifth pamphlet, called (5) *An Apology against a Pamphlet called "A Modest Confutation, &c."* (1642), is chiefly remarkable for a defence of his own Cambridge career. A man who throws dirt, as Milton did, must not be surprised if some of it comes back to him. A son of Bishop Hall, coming forward as his father's champion and avenger, had raked up a garbled version of Milton's quarrel with his tutor Chappell (see p. 6), and by a further distortion had brought it out in the shape that, "after an inordinate and violent youth spent at the university," Milton had been "vomited out thence." From the university this "alchemist of slander" follows him to the city, and declares that where Milton's morning haunts are, he wisses not, but that his afternoons are spent in playhouses and bordelloes. Milton replies to these random charges by a lengthy account of himself and his studious habits. As the reader may expect a specimen of Milton's prose style, I quote a part of this autobiographical paragraph :—

"I had my time, as others have who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places where the opinion was it might be sooner attained; and, as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended, whereof some were grave orators and historians, whom methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce; whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is there be few who know not, I was so allowed to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome. . . . . Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task might with such diligence as they used embolden me, and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear and best value itself by how much more wisely and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises. . . . . Nor blame it in those years to propose to themselves such a reward as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred. Whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For by the firm settling of these persuasions I became so much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate

of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

"These reasonings together with a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem, either of what I was or what I might be, which let envy call pride, and lastly that modesty, whereof, though not in the title-page, yet here, I may be excused to make some beseeming profession, all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions.

"Next, for hear me out now, readers, that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered, I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all Christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight, that he should defend to the expence of his best blood, or of his life if it so befel him, the honour and chastity of virgin or matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble virtue chastity ever must be, to the defence of which so many worthies by such a dear adventure of themselves had sworn. And if I found in the story afterwards any of them by word or deed breaking that oath, I judged it the same fault of the poet as that which is attributed to Homer to have written undecent things of the gods. Only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be borne a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder, to stir him up both by his counsel and his arm to serve and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements to the love and steadfast observation of virtue."

This is one of the autobiographical oases in these pam-

phlets, which are otherwise arid deserts of sand, scorched by the fire of extinct passion. It may be asked why it is that a few men, Gibbon or Milton, are indulged without challenge in talk about themselves, which would be childish vanity or odious egotism in others. When a Frenchman writes, "Nous avons tous, nous autres Français, des séduisantes qualités" (Gaffarel), he is ridiculous. The difference is not merely that we tolerate in a man of confessed superiority what would be intolerable in an equal. This is true; but there is a further distinction of moral quality in men's confessions. In Milton, as in Gibbon, the gratification of self-love, which attends all autobiography, is felt to be subordinated to a nobler intention. The lofty conception which Milton formed of his vocation as a poet, expands his soul and absorbs his personality. It is his office, and not himself, which he magnifies. The details of his life and nurture are important, not because they belong to him, but because he belongs, by dedication, to a high and sacred calling. He is extremely jealous, not of his own reputation, but of the credit which is due to lofty endeavour. We have only to compare Milton's magnanimous assumption of the first place with the paltry conceit with which, in the following age of Dryden and Pope, men spoke of themselves as authors, to see the wide difference between the professional vanity of successful authorship and the proud consciousness of a prophetic mission. Milton leads a dedicated life, and has laid down for himself the law that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem."

If Milton had not been the author of *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*, his political pamphlets would have been

as forgotten as are the thousand civil war tracts preserved in the Thomason collection in the Museum, or have served, at most, as philological landmarks. One, however, of his prose tracts has continued to enjoy some degree of credit down to the present time, for its matter as well as for its words, *Areopagitica*. This tract belongs to the year 1644, the most fertile year in Milton's life, as in it he brought out two of his divorce tracts, the *Tractate of Education*, and the *Areopagitica*. As Milton's moving principle was not any preconceived system of doctrine but the passion for liberty in general, it was natural that he should plead, when occasion called, for liberty of the press, among others. The occasion was one personal to himself.

It is well known that, early in the history of printing, governments became jealous of this new instrument for influencing opinion. In England, in 1556, under Mary, the Stationers' Company was invested with legal privileges, having the twofold object of protecting the book trade and controlling writers. All publications were required to be registered in the register of the company. No persons could set up a press without a licence, or print anything which had not been previously approved by some official censor. The court, which had come to be known as the court of Star-chamber, exercised criminal jurisdiction over offenders, and even issued its own decrees for the regulation of printing. The arbitrary action of this court had no small share in bringing about the resistance to Charles I. But the fall of the royal authority did not mean the emancipation of the press. The Parliament had no intention of letting go the control which the monarchy had exercised; the incidence of the coercion was to be shifted from themselves upon their

opponents. The Star-chamber was abolished, but its powers of search and seizure were transferred to the Company of Stationers. Licensing was to go on as before, but to be exercised by special commissioners, instead of by the Archbishop and the Bishop of London. Only whereas, before, contraband had consisted of Presbyterian books, henceforward it was Catholic and Anglican books which would be suppressed.

Such was not Milton's idea of the liberty of thought and speech in a free commonwealth. He had himself written for the Presbyterians four unlicensed pamphlets. It was now open to him to write any number, and to get them licensed, provided they were written on the same side. This was not liberty, as he had learned it in his classics, "ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet." Over and above this encroachment on the liberty of the free citizen, it so happened that at this moment Milton himself was concerned to ventilate an opinion which was not Presbyterian, and had no chance of passing a Presbyterian licenser. His *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was just ready for press when the ordinance of 1643 came into operation. He published it without licence and without printer's name, in defiance of the law, and awaited the consequences. There were no consequences. He repeated the offence in a second edition in February, 1644, putting his name now (the first edition had been anonymous), and dedicating it to the very Parliament whose ordinance he was setting at nought. This time the Commons, stirred up by a petition from the Company of Stationers, referred the matter to the committee of printing. It went no further. Either it was deemed inexpedient to molest so sound a Parliamentarian as Milton, or Cromwell's "accommodation resolution" of

September 13, 1644, opened the eyes of the Presbyterian zealots to the existence in the kingdom of a new, and much wider, phase of opinion, which ominously threatened the compact little edifice of Presbyterian truth that they had been erecting with a profound conviction of its exclusive orthodoxy.

The occurrence had been sufficient to give a new direction to Milton's thoughts. Regardless of the fact that his plea for liberty in marriage had fallen upon deaf ears, he would plead for liberty of speech. The *Areopagitica, for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing*, came out in November, 1644, an unlicensed, unregistered publication, without printer's or bookseller's name. It was cast in the form of a speech addressed to the Parliament. The motto was taken from Euripides, and printed in the original Greek, which was not, when addressed to the Parliament of 1644, the absurdity which it would be now. The title is less appropriate, being borrowed from the *Areopagitic Discourse* of Isocrates, between which and Milton's *Speech* there is no resemblance either in subject or style. All that the two productions have in common is their form. They are both unspoken orations, written to the address of a representative assembly—the one to the Boulé or Senate of Athens, the other to the Parliament of England

Milton's *Speech* is in his own best style; a copious flood of majestic eloquence, the outpouring of a noble soul with a divine scorn of narrow dogma and paltry aims. But it is a mere pamphlet, extemporised in, at most, a month or two, without research or special knowledge, with no attempt to ascertain general principles, and more than Milton's usual disregard of method. A jurist's question is here handled by a rhetorician. He has preached a noble and heart-stirring sermon on his text,

but the problem for the legislator remains where it was. The vagueness and confusion of the thoughts finds a vehicle in language which is too often overcrowded and obscure. I think the *Areopagitica* has few or no offences against taste; on the other hand, it has few or none of those grand passages which redeem the scurrility of his political pamphlets. The passage in which Milton's visit to Galileo "grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition," is mentioned, is often quoted for its biographical interest; and the terse dictum, "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book," has passed into a current axiom. A paragraph at the close, where he hints that the time may be come to suppress the suppressors, intimates, but so obscurely as to be likely to escape notice, that Milton had already made up his mind that a struggle with the Presbyterian party was to be the sequel of the overthrow of the Royalists. He has not yet arrived at the point he will hereafter reach, of rejecting the very idea of a minister of religion, but he is already aggrieved by the implicit faith which the Puritan laity, who had cast out bishops, were beginning to bestow upon their pastor; "a factor to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs." Finally, it must be noted, that Milton, though he had come to see round Presbyterianism, had not, in 1644, shaken off all dogmatic profession. His toleration of opinion was far from complete. He would call in the intervention of the executioner in the case of "mischievous and libellous books," and could not bring himself to contemplate the toleration of Popery and open superstition, "which as it extirpates all religious and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate; provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and gain the weak and misled."

The *Areopagitica*, as might be expected, produced no effect upon the legislation of the Long Parliament, of whom (says Hallam) "very few acts of political wisdom or courage are recorded." Individual licensers became more lax in the performance of the duty, but this is reasonably to be ascribed to the growing spirit of independency—a spirit which was incompatible with any embargo on the utterance of private opinion. A curious epilogue to the history of this publication is the fact, first brought to light by Mr. Masson, that the author of the *Areopagitica*, at a later time, acted himself in the capacity of licenser. It was in 1651, under the Commonwealth, Marchmont Needham being editor of the weekly paper called *Mercurius Politicus*, that Milton was associated with him as his censor or supervising editor. Mr. Masson conjectures, with some probability, that the leading articles of the *Mercurius*, during part of the year 1651, received touches from Milton's hand. But this was, after all, rather in the character of editor, whose business it is to see that nothing improper goes into the paper, than in that of press licenser in the sense in which the *Areopagitica* had denounced it.

CHAPTER VII

BIOGRAPHICAL. 1640—1649.

In September, 1645, Milton left the garden-house in Aldersgate, for a larger house in Barbican, in the same neighbourhood, but a little further from the city gate, i. e. more in the country. The larger house was, perhaps, required for the accommodation of his pupils (see above, p. 44), but it served to shelter his wife's family, when they were thrown upon the world by the surrender of Oxford in June, 1646. In this Barbican house Mr. Powell died at the end of that year. Milton had been promised with his wife a portion of 1000*l.*; but Mr. Powell's affairs had long been in a very embarrassed condition, and now by the consequences of delinquency that condition had become one of absolute ruin. Great pains have been bestowed by Mr. Masson in unravelling the entanglement of the Powell accounts. The data which remain are ample, and we cannot but feel astonished at the accuracy with which our national records, in more important matters so defective, enable us to set out a debtor and creditor balance of the estate of a private citizen, who died more than 200 years ago. But the circumstances are peculiarly intricate, and we are still unable to reconcile

Mr. Powell's will with the composition records, both of which are extant. As a compounding delinquent, his fine, assessed at the customary rate of two years' income, was fixed by the commissioners at 180*l.* The commissioners must have, therefore, been satisfied that his income did not exceed 90*l.* a year. Yet by his will of date December 30, 1646, he leaves his estate of Forest Hill, the annual value of which alone far exceeded 90*l.*, to his eldest son. This property is not mentioned in the inventory of his estate, real and personal, laid before the commissioners, sworn to by the delinquent, and by them accepted. The possible explanation is that the Forest Hill property had really passed into the possession, by foreclosure, of the mortgagee, Sir Robert Pye, who sate for Woodstock in the Long Parliament, but that Mr. Powell, making his will on his deathbed, pleased himself with the fancy of leaving his son and heir an estate which was no longer his to dispose of. Putting Forest Hill out of the account, it would appear that the sequestrators had dealt somewhat harshly with Mr. Powell; for they had included in their estimate one doubtful asset of 500*l.*, and one non-existent of 400*l.* This last item was a stock of timber stated to be at Forest Hill, but which had really been appropriated without payment by the Parliamentarians, and part of it voted by Parliament itself towards repair of the church in the staunch Puritan town of Banbury.

The upshot of the whole transaction is that, in satisfaction of his claim of 1500*l.* (1000*l.* his wife's dower, 500*l.* an old loan of 1627), Milton came into possession of some property at Wheatley. This property, consisting of the tithes of Wheatley, certain cottages, and three and a half yard lands, had in the time of the disturbances produced only 40*l.* a year. But as the value of all property

improved when the civil war came to an end, Milton found the whole could now be let for 80*l.* But then out of this he had to pay Mr. Powell's composition, reduced to 130*l.* on Milton's petition, and the widow's jointure, computed at 26*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum. What of income remained after these disbursements he might apply towards repaying himself the old loan of 1627. This was all Milton ever saw of the 1000*l.* which Mr. Powell, with the high-flying magnificence of a cavalier who knew he was ruined, had promised as his daughter's portion.

Mr. Powell's death was followed in less than three months by that of John Milton, senior. He died in the house in Barbican, and the entry, "John Milton, gentleman, 15 (March)," among the burials in 1646, is still to be seen in the register of the parish of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. A host of eminent men have traced the first impulse of their genius to their mother. Milton always acknowledged with just gratitude that it was to his father's discerning taste and fostering care, that he owed the encouragement of his studies, and the leisure which rendered them possible. He has registered this gratitude in both prose and verse. The Latin hexameters, "Ad patrem," written at Horton, are inspired by a feeling far beyond commonplace filial piety, and a warmth which is rare indeed in neo-Latin versification. And when, in his prose pamphlets, he has occasion to speak of himself, he does not omit the acknowledgment of "the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, whom God recompense." (*Reason of Church Government.*)

After the death of his father, being now more at ease in his circumstances, he gave up taking pupils, and quitted the large house in Barbican for a smaller in High Holborn, opening backwards into Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. This removal was about Michaelmas, 1647.

During this period, 1639—1649, while his interests were engaged by the all-absorbing events of the civil strife, he wrote no poetry, or none deserving the name. All artists have intervals of non-productiveness, usually caused by exhaustion. This was not Milton's case. His genius was not his master, nor could it pass, like that of Leonardo da Vinci, unmoved through the most tragic scenes. He deliberately suspended it at the call of what he believed to be duty to his country. His unrivalled power of expression was placed at the service of a passionate political conviction. This prostitution of faculty avenged itself; for when he did turn to poetry, his strength was gone from him. The period is chiefly marked by sonnets, not many, one in a year, or thereabouts. That *On the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson*, in 1646, is the lowest point touched by Milton in poetry, for his metrical psalms do not deserve the name.

The sonnet, or Elegy on Mrs. Catherine Thomson in the form of a sonnet, though in poetical merit not distinguishable from the average religious verse of the Caroline age, has an interest for the biographer. It breathes a holy calm that is in sharp contrast with the angry virulence of the pamphlets, which were being written at this very time by the same pen. Amid his intemperate denunciations of his political and ecclesiastical foes, it seems that Milton did not inwardly forfeit the peace which passeth all understanding. He had formerly said himself (*Doctrine and Disc.*), "nothing more than disturbance of mind suspends us from approaching to God." Now, out of all the clamour and the bitterness of the battle of the sects, he can retire and be alone with his heavenly aspirations, which have lost none of their ardour by having laid aside all their sectarianism. His genius has forsaken him, but his soul still glows with the fervour of

devotion. And even of this sonnet we may say what Ellis says of Catullus, that Milton never ceases to be a poet, even when his words are most prosaic.

The sonnet (XV.) *On the Lord-General Fairfax, at the siege of Colchester*, written in 1648, is again a manifesto of the writer's political feelings, nobly uttered, and investing party with a patriotic dignity not unworthy of the man, Milton. It is a hortatory lyric, a trumpet-call to his party in the moment of victory to remember the duties which that victory imposed upon them. It is not without the splendid resonance of the Italian canzone. But it can scarcely be called poetry, expressing, as it does, facts directly, and not indirectly through their imaginative equivalents. Fairfax was, doubtless, well worthy that Milton should have commemorated him in a higher strain. Of Fairfax's eminent qualities the sonnet only dwells on two, his personal valour, which had been tried in many fights—he had been three times dangerously wounded in the Yorkshire campaign—and his superiority to sordid interests. Of his generalship, in which he was second to Cromwell only, and of his love of arts and learning, nothing is said, though the last was the passion of his life, for which at forty he renounced ambition. Perhaps in 1648 Milton, who lived a very retired life, did not know of these tastes, and had not heard that it was by Fairfax's care that the Bodleian library was saved from wreck on the surrender of Oxford in 1646. And it was not till later, years after the sonnet was written, that the same Fairfax, "whose name in arms through Europe rings," became a competitor of Milton in the attempt to paraphrase the Psalms in metre.

Milton's paraphrase of the Psalms belongs to history, but to the history of psalmody, not that of poetry. At St. Paul's School, at fifteen, the boy had turned two psalms,

the 114th and the 136th, by way of exercise. That in his day of plenary inspiration, Milton, who disdained Dryden as "a rhymist but no poet," and has recorded his own impatience with the "drawling versifiers," should have undertaken to grind down the noble antistrophic lyrics of the Hebrew bard into ballad rhymes for the use of Puritan worship, would have been impossible. But the idea of being useful to his country had acquired exclusive possession of his mind. Even his faculty of verse should be employed in the good cause. If Parliament had set him the task, doubtless he would have willingly undertaken it, as Corneille, in the blindness of Catholic obedience, versified the *Imitatio Christi* at the command of the Jesuits. Milton was not officially employed, but voluntarily took up the work. The Puritans were bent upon substituting a new version of the Davidic Psalms for that of Sternhold and Hopkins, for no other reason than that the latter formed part of the hated Book of Common Prayer. The Commons had pronounced in favour of a version by one of their own members, the staunch Puritan M.P. for Truro, Francis Rouse. The Lords favoured a rival book, and numerous other claimants were before the public. Dissatisfied with any of these attempts, Milton would essay himself. In 1648 he turned nine psalms, and recurring to the task in 1653, "did into verse" eight more. He thought these specimens worth preserving, and annexing to the volume of his poems which he published himself in 1673. As this doggerel continues to encumber each succeeding edition of the *Poetical Works*, it is as well that Milton did not persevere with his experiment and produce a complete Psalter. He prudently abandoned a task in which success is impossible. A metrical psalm, being a compromise between the psalm and the hymn, like other compro-

mises, misses, rather than combines, the distinctive excellences of the things united. That Milton should ever have attempted what poetry forbids, is only another proof how entirely at this period more absorbing motives had possession of his mind, and overbore his poetical judgment. It is a coincidence worth remembering that Milton's contemporary, Lord Clarendon, was at this very time solacing his exile at Madrid by composing, not a version but a commentary upon the Psalms, "applying those devotions to the troubles of this time."

Yet all the while that he was thus unfaithful in practice to his art, it was poetry that possessed his real affections, and the reputation of a poet which formed his ambition. It was a temporary separation, and not a divorce, which he designed. In each successive pamphlet he reiterates his undertaking to redeem his pledge of a great work, as soon as liberty shall be consolidated in the realm. Meanwhile, as an earnest of what should be hereafter, he permitted the publication of a collection of his early poems.

This little volume of some 200 pages, rude in execution as it is, ranks among the highest prizes of the book collector, very few copies being extant, and those mostly in public libraries. It appeared in 1645, and owed its appearance, not to the vanity of the author, but to the zeal of a publisher. Humphrey Moseley, at the sign of the Prince's Arms, in St. Paul's Churchyard, suggested the collection to Milton, and undertook the risk of it, though knowing, as he says in the prefixed address of The Stationer to the Reader, that "the slightest pamphlet is nowadays more vendible than the works of learnedest men." It may create some surprise that, in 1645, there should have been any public in England for

a volume of verse. Naseby had been fought in June, Philiphaugh in September, Fairfax and Cromwell were continuing their victorious career in the west, Chester, Worcester, and the stronghold of Oxford, alone holding out for the King. It was clear that the conflict was decided in favour of the Parliament, but men's minds must have been strung to a pitch of intense expectation as to what kind of settlement was to come. Yet, at the very crisis of the civil strife, we find a London publisher able to bring out the Poems of Waller (1644), and sufficiently encouraged by their reception to follow them up, in the next year, with the Poems of Mr. John Milton. Are we warranted in inferring that a finer public was beginning to loathe the dreary theological polemic of which it had had a surfeit, and turned to a book of poetry as that which was most unlike the daily garbage, just as a later public absorbed five thousand copies of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* in the year of Austerlitz? One would like to know who were the purchasers of Milton and Waller, when the cavalier families were being ruined by confiscations and compositions, and Puritan families would turn with pious horror from the very name of a Mask.

Milton was himself editor of his own volume, and prefixed to it, again out of Virgil's Eclogues, the characteristic motto, "Baccare frontem Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua *futuro*," indicating that his poetry was all to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LATIN SECRETARYSHIP.

The Crown having fallen on January 30, 1649, and the House of Lords by the vote of February 6 following, the sovereign power in England was for the moment in the hands of that fragment of the Long Parliament, which remained after the various purges and expulsions to which it had been subjected. Some of the excluded members were allowed to return, and by occasional new elections in safe boroughs the number of members was raised to one hundred and fifty, securing an average attendance of about seventy. The future government of the nation was declared to be by way of a republic, and the writs ran in the name of the Keepers of the Liberty of England, by authority of Parliament. But the real centre of power was the Council of State, a body of forty-one members, nominated for a period of twelve months, according to a plan of constitution devised by the army leaders. In the hands of this republican Council was concentrated a combination of power such as had never been wielded by any English monarch. But, though its attribution of authority was great, its exercise of the powers lodged with it was hampered by differences among

its members, and the disaffection of various interests and parties. The Council of State contained most of the notable statesmen of the Parliamentary party, and had before it a vast task in reorganizing the administration of England, in the conduct of an actual war in Ireland, a possible war in Scotland, and in the maintenance of the honour of the republic in its relations with foreign princes.

The Council of State prepared the business for its consideration through special committees for special departments of the public service. The Committee for Foreign Affairs consisted of Whitelocke, Vane, Lord Lisle, Lord Denbigh, Mr. Marten, Mr. Lisle. A secretary was required to translate despatches, both those which were sent out, and those which were received. Nothing seems more natural than that the author of the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, who was at once a staunch Parliamentarian, an accomplished Latin scholar, and conversant with more than one of the spoken languages of the Continent, should be thought of for the office. Yet so little was Milton personally known, living as he did the life of a retired student, that it was the accident of his having the acquaintance of one of the new Council to which he owed the appointment.

The post was offered him, but would he accept it? He had never ceased to revolve in his mind subjects capable of poetical treatment, and to cherish his own vocation as the classical poet of the English language. Peace had come, and leisure was within his reach. He was poor, but his wants were simple, and he had enough wherewith to meet them. Already, in 1649, unmistakable symptoms threatened his sight, and warned him of the necessity of the most rigid economy in the use of the eyes. The duties that he was now asked to undertake were in-

definite already in amount, and would doubtless extend themselves if zealously discharged.

But the temptation was strong, and he did not resist it. The increase of income was, doubtless, to Milton the smallest among the inducements now offered him. He had thought it a sufficient and an honourable employment to serve his country with his pen as a volunteer. Here was an offer to become her official, authorised servant, and to bear a part, though a humble part, in the great work of reorganisation which was now to be attempted. Above all other allurements to a retired student, unversed in men, and ready to idealise character, was the opportunity of becoming at once personally acquainted with all the great men of the patriotic party, whom his ardent imagination had invested with heroic qualities. The very names of Fairfax, Vane, and Cromwell, called up in him emotions for which prose was an inadequate vehicle. Nor was it only that in the Council itself he would be in daily intercourse with such men as Henry Marten, Hutchinson, Whitelocke, Harrington, St. John, Ludlow, but his position would introduce him at once to all the members of the House who were worth knowing. It was not merely a new world; it was *the* world which was here opened for the first time to Milton. And we must remember that, all scholar as he was, Milton was well convinced of the truth that there are other sources of knowledge besides books. He had himself spent "many studious and contemplative years in the search of religious and civil knowledge," yet he knew that, for a mind large enough to "take in a general survey of humane things," it was necessary to know—

> The world, . . . her glory,
> Empires and monarchs, and their radiant courts,
> Best school of best experience.
>
> *P. R.* iii. 237.

He had repeatedly, as if excusing his political interludes, renewed his pledge to devote all his powers to poetry as soon as they should be fully ripe. To complete his education as a poet, he wanted initiation into affairs. Here was an opening far beyond any he had ever dreamed of. The sacrifice of time and precious eyesight which he was to make was costly, but it was not pure waste; it would be partly returned to him in a ripened experience in this

> Insight
> In all things that to greatest actions lead.

He accepted the post at once without hesitation. On March 13, 1649, the Committee for Foreign Affairs was directed to make the offer to him; on March 15, he attended at Whitehall to be admitted to office. Well would it have been both for his genius and his fame if he had declined it. His genius might have reverted to its proper course, while he was in the flower of age, with eyesight still available, and a spirit exalted by the triumph of the good cause. His fame would have been saved from the degrading incidents of the contention with Salmasius and Morus, and from being tarnished by the obloquy of the faction which he fought, and which conquered him. No man can with impunity insult and trample upon his fellow-man, even in the best of causes. Especially if he be an artist, he makes it impossible to obtain equitable appreciation of his work.

So far as Milton reckoned upon a gain in experience from his secretaryship, he doubtless reaped it. Such a probation could not be passed without solidifying the judgment, and correcting its tendency to error. And this school of affairs, which is indispensable for the historian,

may also be available for the poet. Yet it would be difficult to point in Milton's subsequent poetry to any element which the poet can be thought to have imbibed from the foreign secretary. Where, as in Milton's two epics and *Samson Agonistes*, the personages are all supernatural or heroic, there is no room for the employment of knowledge of the world. Had Milton written comedy, like Molière, he might have said with Molière after he had been introduced at court, "Je n'ai plus que faire d'étudier Plaute et Terence; je n'ai qu'à étudier le monde."

The office into which Milton was now inducted is called in the Council books that of "Secretary for foreign tongues." Its duties were chiefly the translation of despatches from, and to, foreign governments. The degree of estimation in which the Latin secretary was held, may be measured by the amount of salary assigned him. For while the English chief Secretary had a salary of 730*l.* (= 2200*l.* of our day), the Latin Secretary was paid only 288*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* (= 900*l.*). For this, not very liberal pay, he was told that all his time was to be at the disposal of the government. Lincoln's Inn Fields was too far off for a servant of the Council who might have to attend meetings at seven in the morning. He accordingly migrated to Charing Cross, now become again Charing without the cross, this work of art having been an early (1647) victim of religious barbarism. In November he was accommodated with chambers in Whitehall. But from these he was soon ousted by claimants more considerable or more importunate, and in 1651 he removed to "a pretty garden-house" in Petty France, in West minster, next door to the Lord Scudamore's, and opening into St. James's Park. The house was extant

till 1877, when it disappeared, the last of Milton's many London residences. It had long ceased to look into St. James's Park, more than one row of houses, encroachments upon the public park, having grown up between. The garden-house had become a mere ordinary street house in York-street, only distinguished from the squalid houses on either side of it by a tablet affixed by Bentham, inscribed "sacred to Milton, prince of poets." Petty France lost its designation in the French Revolution, in obedience to the childish petulance which obliterates the name of any one who may displease you at the moment, and became one of the seventeen York-streets of the metropolis. Soon after the re-baptism of the street, Milton's house was occupied by William Hazlitt, who rented it of Bentham. Milton had lived in it for nine years, from 1651 till a few weeks before the Restoration. Its nearness to Whitehall where the Council sat, was less a convenience than a necessity.

For Milton's life now became one of close attention, and busy service. As Latin secretary, and Weckherlin's successor, indeed, his proper duties were only those of a clerk or translator. But his aptitude for business of a literary kind soon drew on him a great variety of employment. The demand for a Latin translation of a despatch was not one of frequent occurrence. The Letters of the Parliament, and of Oliver and Richard, Protectors, which are, intrusively, printed among Milton's works, are but one hundred and thirty-seven in all. This number is spread over ten years, being at the rate of about fourteen per year; most of them are very short. For the purposes of a biography of Milton, it is sufficient to observe, that the dignified attitude which the Commonwealth took up towards foreign powers lost none of its elevation in being

conveyed in Miltonic Latin. Whether satisfaction for the murder of an envoy is to be extorted from the arrogant court of Madrid, or an apology is to be offered to a humble count of Oldenburg for delay in issuing a salvaguardia which had been promised, the same equable dignity of expression is maintained, equally remote from crouching before the strong, and hectoring the weak.

His translations were not all the duties of the new secretary. He must often serve as interpreter at audiences of foreign envoys. He must superintend the semi-official organ, the *Mercurius Politicus*. He must answer the manifesto of the Presbyterians of Ireland. The *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny are Milton's composition, but from instructions. By the peace the Irish had obtained home rule in its widest extent, release from the oath of supremacy, and the right to tie their ploughs to the tail of the horse. The same peace also conceded to them the militia, a trust which Charles I. had said he would not devolve on the Parliament of England, "not for an hour!" Milton is indignant that these indulgences, which had been refused to their obedience, should have been extorted by their rebellion, and the massacre of "200,000 Protestants." This is an exaggeration of a butchery sufficiently tragic in its real proportions, and in a later tract (*Eikonoklastes*) he reduces it to 154,000. Though the savage Irish are barbarians, uncivilised and uncivilisable, the *Observations* distinctly affirm the new principle of toleration. Though popery be a superstition, the death of all true religion, still conscience is not within the cognisance of the magistrate. The civil sword is to be employed against civil offences only. In adding that the one exception to this toleration is atheism, Milton is careful to state this limitation as being the tolera-

tion professed by Parliament, and not as his private opinion.

So well satisfied were the Council with their secretary's *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny, that they next imposed upon him a far more important labour, a reply to the *Eikon Basilikè*. The execution of Charles I. was not an act of vengeance, but a measure of public safety. If, as Hallam affirms, there mingled in the motives of the managers any strain of personal ill-will, this was merged in the necessity of securing, themselves from the vengeance of the King, and what they had gained from being taken back. They were alarmed by the reaction which had set in, and had no choice but to strengthen themselves by a daring policy. But the first effect of the removal of the King by violence was to give a powerful stimulus to the reaction already in progress. The groan which burst from the spectators before Whitehall on January 30, 1649, was only representative of the thrill of horror which ran through England and Scotland in the next ten days. This feeling found expression in a book entitled "*Eikon Basilikè*, the portraiture of his sacred majesty in his solitude and sufferings." The book was, it should seem, composed by Dr. Gauden, but professed to be an authentic copy of papers written by the King. It is possible that Gauden may have had in his hands some written scraps of the King's meditations. If he had such, he only used them as hints to work upon. Gauden was a churchman whom his friends might call liberal, and his enemies time-serving. He was a churchman of the stamp of Archbishop Williams, and preferred bishops and the Common-prayer to presbyters and extempore sermons, but did not think the difference between the two of the essence of religion. In better times Gauden would have

passed for broad, though his latitudinarianism was more the result of love of ease than of philosophy. Though a royalist he sat in the Westminster Assembly, and took the covenant, for which compliance he nearly lost the reward which, after the Restoration, became his due. Like the university-bred men of his day, Gauden was not a man of ideas, but of style. In the present instance the idea was supplied by events. The saint and martyr, the man of sorrows, praying for his murderers, the King, who renounced an earthly kingdom to gain a heavenly, and who in return for his benefits received from an unthankful people a crown of thorns—this was the theme supplied to the royalist advocate. Poet's imagination had never invented one more calculated to touch the popular heart. This *imitatio Christi* to which every private Christian theoretically aspires, had been realised by a true prince upon an actual scaffold with a graceful dignity of demeanour, of which it may be said, that nothing in life became him like the leaving it.

This moving situation Gauden, no mean stylist, set out in the best academical language of the period. Frigid and artificial it may read now, but the passion and pity, which is not in the book, was supplied by the readers of the time. And men are not dainty as to phrase when they meet with an expression of their own sentiments. The readers of *Eikon Basilike*—and forty-seven editions were necessary to supply the demand of a population of eight millions—attributed to the pages of the book emotions raised in themselves by the tragic catastrophe. They never doubted that the meditations were those of the royal martyr, and held the book, in the words of Sir Edward Nicholas, for "the most exquisite, pious, and princely piece ever written." The Parliament thought

themselves called upon to put forth a reply. If one book could cause such a commotion of spirits, another book could allay it—the ordinary illusion of those who do not consider that the vogue of a printed appeal depends, not on the contents of the appeal, but on a predisposition of the public temper.

Selden, the most learned man, not only of his party, but of Englishmen, was first thought of, but the task was finally assigned to the Latin Secretary. Milton's ready pen completed the answer, *Eikonoklastes*, a quarto of 242 pages, before October, 1649. It is, like all answers, worthless as a book. Eikonoklastes, the Image-breaker, takes the Image, Eikon, paragraph by paragraph, turning it round, and asserting the negative. To the Royalist view of the points in dispute Milton opposes the Independent view. A refutation, which follows each step of an adverse book, is necessarily devoid of originality. But Milton is worse than tedious; his reply is in a tone of rude railing and insolent swagger, which would have been always unbecoming, but which at this moment was grossly indecent.

Milton must, however, be acquitted of one charge which has been made against him, viz., that he taunts the king with his familiarity with Shakespeare. The charge rests on a misunderstanding. In quoting *Richard III.* in illustration of his own meaning, Milton says, "I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the King might be less conversant, but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakespeare." Though not an overt gibe, there certainly lurks an insinuation to Milton's Puritan readers, to whom stage plays were an abomination—an unworthy device of rhetoric, as appealing to a superstition in others which

the writer himself does not share. In Milton's contemptuous reference to Sidney's *Arcadia* as a vain amatorious poem, we feel that the finer sense of the author of *L'Allegro* has suffered from immersion in the slough of religious and political faction.

Gauden, raking up material from all quarters, had inserted in his compilation a prayer taken from the *Arcadia*. Milton mercilessly works this topic against his adversary. It is surprising that this plagiarism from so well-known a book as the *Arcadia* should not have opened Milton's eyes to the unauthentic character of the *Eikon*. He alludes, indeed, to a suspicion which was abroad that one of the royal chaplains was a secret coadjutor. But he knew nothing of Gauden at the time of writing the *Eikonoklastes*, and probably he never came to know anything. The secret of the authorship of the *Eikon* was well kept, being known only to a very few persons—the two royal brothers, Bishop Morley, the Earl of Bristol, and Clarendon. These were all safe men, and Gauden was not likely to proclaim himself an impostor. He pleaded his authorship, however, as a claim to preferment at the Restoration, when the church spoils came to be partitioned among the conquerors, and he received the bishopric of Exeter. A bishopric—because less than the highest preferment could not be offered to one whose pen had done such signal service; and Exeter—because the poorest see (then valued at 500*l.* a year) was good enough for a man who had taken the covenant and complied with the usurping government. By ceaseless importunity the author of the *Eikon Basilike* obtained afterwards the see of Worcester, while the portion of the author of *Eikonoklastes* was poverty, infamy, and calumny. A century after Milton's death it was safe for the most popular

writer of the day to say that the prayer from the *Arcadia* had been interpolated in the *Eikon* by Milton himself, and then by him charged upon the King as a plagiarism. (Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*.)

CHAPTER IX.

MILTON AND SALMASIUS.—BLINDNESS.

The mystery which long surrounded the authorship of *Eikon Basilike* lends a literary interest to Milton's share in that controversy, which does not belong to his next appearance in print. Besides, his pamphlets against Salmasius and Morus are written in Latin, and to the general reader in this country and in America inaccessible in consequence. In Milton's day it was otherwise; the widest circle of readers could only be reached through Latin. For this reason, when Charles II. wanted a public vindication of his father's memory, it was indispensable that it should be composed in that language. The *Eikon* was accordingly turned into Latin, by one of the royal chaplains, Earle, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury. But this was not enough; a defence in form was necessary, an *Apologia Socratis*, such as Plato composed for his master after his death. It must not only be written in Latin, but in such Latin as to ensure its being read.

In 1649 Charles II. was living at the Hague, and it so happened that the man, who was in the highest repute in all Europe as a Latinist, was professor at the neighbouring university of Leyden. Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise)

was commissioned to prepare a manifesto, which should be at once a vindication of Charles's memory, and an indictment against the regicide government. Salmasius was a man of enormous reading and no judgment. He says of himself that he wrote Latin more easily than his mother-tongue (French). And his Latin was all the more readable because it was not classical or idiomatic. With all his reading—and Isaac Casaubon had said of him when in his teens that he had incredible erudition—he was still, at sixty, quite unacquainted with public affairs, and had neither the politician's tact necessary to draw a state paper as Clarendon would have drawn it, nor the literary tact which had enabled Erasmus to command the ear of the public. Salmasius undertook his task as a professional advocate, though without pay, and Milton accepted the duty of replying as advocate for the Parliament, also without reward; he was fighting for a cause which was not another's but his own.

Salmasius' *Defensio regia*—that was the title of his book—reached this country before the end of 1649. The Council of State, in very unnecessary alarm, issued a prohibition. On 8th January, 1650, the Council ordered "that Mr. Milton do prepare something in answer to the book of Salmasius." Early in March, 1651, Milton's answer, entitled *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, was out.

Milton was as much above Salmasius in mental power as he was inferior to him in extent of book knowledge. But the conditions of retort which he had chosen to accept neutralised this superiority. His greater power was spent in a greater force of invective. Instead of setting out the case of the Parliament in all the strength of which it was capable, Milton is intent upon tripping up Salmasius, contradicting him, and making him odious

or ridiculous. He called his book a *Defence of the People of England;* but when he should have been justifying his clients from the charges of rebellion and regicide before the bar of Europe, Milton is bending all his invention upon personalities. He exaggerates the foibles of Salmasius, his vanity, and the vanity of Madame de Saumaise, her ascendancy over her husband, his narrow pedantry, his ignorance of everything but grammar and words. He exhausts the Latin vocabulary of abuse to pile up every epithet of contumely and execration on the head of his adversary. It but amounts to calling Salmasius fool and knave through a couple of hundred pages, till the exaggeration of the style defeats the orator's purpose, and we end by regarding the whole, not as a serious pleading, but as an epideictic display. Hobbes said truly that the two books were "like two declamations, for and against, made by one and the same man as a rhetorical exercise" (*Behemoth*).

Milton's *Defensio* was not calculated to advance the cause of the Parliament, and there is no evidence that it produced any effect upon the public, beyond that of raising Milton's personal credit. That England, and Puritan England, where humane studies were swamped in a biblical brawl, should produce a man who could write Latin as well as Salmasius, was a great surprise to the learned world in Holland. Salmasius was unpopular at Leyden, and there was therefore a predisposition to regard Milton's book with favour. Salmasius was twenty years older than Milton, and in these literary digladiations readers are always ready to side with a new writer. The contending interests of the two great English parties, the wider issue between republic and absolutism, the speculative inquiry into the right of resistance, were lost sight of by the

spectators of this literary duel. The only question was whether Salmasius could beat the new champion, or the new man beat Salmasius, at a match of vituperation.

Salmasius of course put in a rejoinder. His rapid pen found no difficulty in turning off 300 pages of fluent Latin. It was his last occupation. He died at Spa, where he was taking the waters, in September, 1653, and his reply was not published till 1660, after the Restoration, when all interest had died out of the controversy. If it be true that the work was written at Spa, without books at hand, it is certainly a miraculous effort of memory. It does no credit to Salmasius. He had raked together, after the example of Scioppius against Scaliger, all the tittle-tattle which the English exiles had to retail about Milton and his antecedents. Bramhall, who bore Milton a special grudge, was the channel of some of this scandal, and Bramhall's source was possibly Chappell, the tutor with whom Milton had had the early misunderstanding. (See above p. 6). If any one thinks that classical studies of themselves cultivate the taste and the sentiments, let him look into Salmasius's *Responsio*. There he will see the first scholar of his age not thinking it unbecoming to taunt Milton with his blindness, in such language as this: "a puppy, once my pretty little man, now blear-eyed, or rather a blindling; having never had any mental vision, he has now lost his bodily sight; a silly coxcomb, fancying himself a beauty; an unclean beast, with nothing more human about him than his guttering eyelids; the fittest doom for him would be to hang him on the highest gallows, and set his head on the Tower of London." These are some of the incivilities, not by any means the most revolting, but such as I dare reproduce, of this literary warfare.

Salmasius's taunt about Milton's venal pen is no less false than his other gibes. The places of those who served the Commonwealth, were places of "hard work and short rations." Milton never received for his *Defensio* a sixpence beyond his official salary. It has indeed been asserted that he was paid 1000*l.* for it by order of Parliament, and this falsehood having been adopted by Johnson —himself a pensioner—has passed into all the biographies, and will no doubt continue to be repeated to the end of time. This is a just nemesis upon Milton, who on his part had twitted Salmasius with having been complimented by the exiled King with a purse of 100 Jacobuses for his performance. The one insinuation was as false as the other. Charles II. was too poor to offer more than thanks. Milton was too proud to receive for defending his country what the Parliament was willing to pay. Sir Peter Wentworth, of Lillingston Lovell, in Oxfordshire, left in his will 100*l.* to Milton for his book against Salmasius. But this was long after the Restoration, and Milton did not live to receive the legacy.

Instead of receiving an honorarium for his *Defence of the English People*, Milton had paid for it a sacrifice for which money could not compensate him. His eyesight, though quick, as he was a proficient with the rapier, had never been strong. His constant headaches, his late study, and (thinks Phillips) his perpetual tampering with physic to preserve his sight, concurred to bring the calamity upon him. It had been steadily coming on for a dozen years before, and about 1650 the sight of the left eye was gone. He was warned by his doctor that if he persisted in using the remaining eye for book-work, he would lose that too. "The choice lay before me," Milton writes in the *Second Defence*, "between dereliction of a

supreme duty and loss of eyesight; in such a case I could not listen to the physician, not if Æsculapius himself had spoken from his sanctuary; I could not but obey that inward monitor, I know not what, that spake to me from heaven. I considered with myself that many had purchased less good with worse ill, as they who give their lives to reap only glory, and I thereupon concluded to employ the little remaining eyesight I was to enjoy in doing this, the greatest service to the common weal it was in my power to render."

It was about the early part of the year 1652 that the calamity was consummated. At the age of forty-three he was in total darkness. The deprivation of sight, one of the severest afflictions of which humanity is capable, falls more heavily on the man whose occupation lies among books, than upon others. He who has most to lose, loses most. To most persons books are but an amusement, an interlude between the hours of serious occupation. The scholar is he who has found the key to knowledge, and knows his way about in the world of printed books. To find this key, to learn the map of this country, requires a long apprenticeship. This is a point few men can hope to reach much before the age of forty. Milton had attained it only to find fruition snatched from him. He had barely time to spell one line in the book of wisdom, before, like the wizard's volume in romance, it was hopelessly closed against him for ever. Any human being is shut out by loss of sight from accustomed pleasures, the scholar is shut out from knowledge. Shut out at forty-three, when his great work was not even begun! He consoles himself with the fancy that in his pamphlet, the *Defensio*, he had done a great work (*quanta maxima quivi*) for his country. This poor delusion helped him doubtless to

support his calamity. He could not foresee that, in less than ten years, the great work would be totally annihilated, his pamphlet would be merged in the obsolete mass of civil war tracts, and the *Defensio*, on which he had expended his last year of eyesight, only mentioned because it had been written by the author of *Paradise Lost*.

The nature of Milton's disease is not ascertainable from the account he has given of it. In the well-known passage of *Paradise Lost*, iii. 25, he hesitates between amaurosis (drop serene) and cataract (suffusion)

> So thick a drop serene hath quench'd their orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veil'd.

A medical friend referred to by Professor Alfred Stern, tells him that some of the symptoms are more like glaucoma. Milton himself has left such an account as a patient ignorant of the anatomy of the organ could give. It throws no light on the nature of the malady. But it is characteristic of Milton that even his affliction does not destroy his solicitude about his personal appearance. The taunts of his enemies about "the lack-lustre eye, guttering with prevalent rheum" did not pass unfelt. In his *Second Defence* Milton informs the world that his eyes "are externally uninjured. They shine with an unclouded light, just like the eyes of one whose vision is perfect. This is the only point in which I am, against my will, a hypocrite." The vindication appears again in Sonnet XIX. "These eyes, though clear To outward view of blemish or of spot." In later years, when the exordium of Book iii. of *Paradise Lost* was composed, in the pathetic story of his blindness, this little touch of vanity has disappeared, as incompatible with the solemn dignity of the occasion.

CHAPTER X.

MILTON AND MORUS—THE SECOND DEFENCE—THE DEFENCE FOR HIMSELF.

Civil history is largely a history of wars between states, and literary history is no less the record of quarrels in print between jealous authors. Poets and artists, more susceptible than practical men, seem to live a life of perpetual wrangle. The history of these petty feuds is not healthy intellectual food, it is at best amusing scandal. But these quarrels of authors do not degrade the authors in our eyes, they only show them to be, what we knew, as vain, irritable, and opinionative as other men. Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Voltaire, Rousseau, belabour their enemies, and we see nothing incongruous in their doing so. It is not so when the awful majesty of Milton descends from the empyrean throne of contemplation to use the language of the gutter or the fish-market. The bathos is unthinkable. The universal intellect of Bacon shrank to the paltry pursuit of place. The disproportion between the intellectual capaciousness and the moral aim jars upon the sense of fitness, and the name of Bacon, "wisest, meanest," has passed into a proverb. Milton's fall is far worse. It is not here a union of grasp of mind with an

ignoble ambition, but the plunge of the moral nature itself from the highest heights to that despicable region of vulgar scurrility and libel, which is below the level of average gentility and education. The name of Milton is a synonym for sublimity. He has endowed our language with the loftiest and noblest poetry it possesses, and the same man is found employing speech for the most unworthy purpose to which it can be put, that of defaming and vilifying a personal enemy, and an enemy so mean that barely to have been mentioned by Milton had been an honour to him. In Salmasius, Milton had at least been measuring his Latin against the Latin of the first classicist of the age. In Alexander Morus he wreaked august periods of Roman eloquence upon a vagabond preacher, of chance fortunes and tarnished reputation, a *græculus esuriens*, who appeared against Milton by the turn of accidents, and not as the representative of the opposite principle. In crushing Morus, Milton could not beguile himself with the idea that he was serving a cause.

In 1652 our country began to reap the fruits of the costly efforts it had made to obtain good government. A central authority was at last established, stronger than any which had existed since Elisabeth, and one which extended over Scotland and Ireland, no less than over England. The ecclesiastical and dynastic aims of the Stuart monarchy had been replaced by a national policy, in which the interests of the people of Great Britain sprang to the first place. The immediate consequence of this union of vigour and patriotism, in the government, was the self-assertion of England as a commercial, and therefore as a naval power. This awakened spirit of conscious strength meant war with the Dutch, who while England was pursuing ecclesiastical ends, had possessed themselves

of the trade of the world. War accordingly broke out early in 1652. Even before it came to real fighting, the war of pamphlets had recommenced. The prohibition of Salmasius' *Defensio regia* annulled itself as a matter of course, and Salmasius was free to prepare a second *Defensio* in answer to Milton. For the most vulnerable point of the new English Commonwealth, was through the odium excited on the continent against regicide. And the quarter from which the monarchical pamphlets were hurled against the English republic, was the press of the republic of the United Provinces, the country which had set the first example of successful rebellion against its lawful prince.

Before Salmasius' reply was ready, there was launched from the Hague, in March, 1652, a virulent royalist piece in Latin, under the title of *Regii sanguinis clamor ad cœlum* (Cry of the King's blood to Heaven against the English parricides). Its 160 pages contained the usual royalist invective in a rather common style of hyperbolical declamation, such as that "in comparison of the execution of Charles I., the guilt of the Jews in crucifying Christ was as nothing." Exaggerated praises of Salmasius were followed by scurrilous and rabid abuse of Milton. In the style of the most shameless Jesuit lampoon, the *Amphitheatrum* or the *Scaliger hypobolimæus*, and with Jesuit tactics, every odious crime is imputed to the object of the satire, without regard to truth or probability. Exiles are proverbially credulous, and it is likely enough that the gossip of the English refugees at the Hague was much employed in improving or inventing stories about the man, who had dared to answer the royalist champion in Latin as good as his own. Salmasius in his *Defensio* had employed these stories, distorting the events of Milton's

life to discredit him. But for the author of the *Clamor* there was no such excuse, for the book was composed in England, by an author living in Oxford and London, who had every opportunity for informing himself accurately of the facts about Milton's life and conversation. He chose rather to heap up at random the traditional vocabulary of defamation, which the Catholic theologians had employed for some generations past, as their best weapon against their adversaries. In these infamous productions, hatched by celibate pedants in the foul atmosphere of the Jesuit colleges, the gamut of charges always ranges from bad grammar to unnatural crime. The only circumstance which can be alleged in mitigation of the excesses of the *Regii sanguinis clamor* is that Milton had provoked the onfall by his own violence. He who throws dirt must expect that dirt will be thrown back at him, and when it comes to mud-throwing, the blackguard has, as it is right that he should have, the best of it.

The author of the *Clamor* was Peter Du Moulin, a son of the celebrated French Calvinist preacher of the same name. The author not daring to entrust his pamphlet to an English press, had sent it over to Holland, where it was printed under the supervision of Alexander Morus. This Morus (More or Moir) was of Scottish parentage, but born (1616) at Castres, where his father was principal of the Protestant college. Morus fitted the *Clamor* with a preface, in which Milton was further reviled, and styled a "monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademtum." The secret of the authorship was strictly kept, and Morus having been known to be concerned in the publication, was soon transformed in public belief into the author. So it was reported to Milton, and so Milton believed. He nursed his wrath, and took two years to

meditate his blow. He caused inquiries to be made into Morus's antecedents. It happened that Morus's conduct had been wanting in discretion, especially in his relations with women. He had been equally imprudent in his utterances on some of the certainties of Calvinistic divinity. It was easy to collect any amount of evidence under both these heads. The system of kirk discipline offered a ready-made machinery of espionage and delation. The standing jest of the fifteenth century on the "governante" of the curé was replaced, in Calvinistic countries, by the anxiety of every minister to detect his brother minister in any intimacy upon which a scandalous construction could be put.

Morus endeavoured, through every channel at his command, to convince Milton that he was not the author of the *Clamor*. He could have saved himself by revealing the real author, who was lurking all the while close to Milton's elbow, and whose safety depended on Morus' silence. This high-minded respect for another's secret is more to Morus' honour, than any of the petty gossip about him is to his discredit. He had nothing to offer, therefore, but negative assurances, and mere denial weighed nothing with Milton, who was fully convinced that Morus lied from terror. Milton's *Defensio Secunda* came out in May, 1654. In this piece (written in Latin) Morus is throughout assumed to be the author of the *Clamor*, and as such is pursued through many pages in a strain of invective, in which banter is mingled with ferocity. The Hague tittle-tattle about Morus's love-affairs is set forth in the pomp of Milton's loftiest Latin. Sonorous periods could hardly be more disproportioned to their material content. To have kissed a girl is painted as the blackest of crimes. The sublime and the ridiculous are here

blended without the step between. Milton descends even to abuse the publisher, Vlac, who had officially signed his name to Morus's preface. The mixture of fanatical choler and grotesque jocularity, in which he rolls forth his charges of incontinence against Morus, and of petty knavery against Vlac, is only saved from being unseemly by being ridiculous. The comedy is complete when we remember that Morus had not written the *Clamor*, nor Vlac the preface. Milton's rage blinded him; he is mad Ajax castigating innocent sheep instead of Achæans.

The Latin pamphlets are indispensable to a knowledge of Milton's disposition. We see in them his grand disdain of his opponents, reproducing the concentrated intellectual scorn of the Latin Persius; his certainty of the absolute justice of his own cause, and the purity of his own motives. This lofty cast of thought is combined with an eagerness to answer the meanest taunts. The intense subjectivity of the poet breaks out in these paragraphs, and while he should be stating the case of the republic, he holds Europe listening to an account of himself, his accomplishments, his studies and travels, his stature, the colour of his eyes, his skill in fencing, &c. These egoistic utterances must have seemed to Milton's contemporaries to be intrusive and irrelevant vanity. *Paradise Lost* was not as yet, and to the Council of State Milton was, what he was to Whitelocke, "a blind man who wrote Latin." But these paragraphs, in which he talks of himself, are to us the only living fragments out of many hundred worthless pages.

To the *Defensio Secunda* there was of course a reply by Morus. It was entitled *Fides Publica*, because it was largely composed of testimonials to character. When one priest charges another with unchastity, the world

looks on and laughs. But it is no laughing matter to the defendant in such an action. He can always bring exculpatory evidence, and in spite of any evidence he is always believed to be guilty. The effect of Milton's furious denunciation of Morus had been to damage his credit in religious circles, and to make mothers of families shy of allowing him to visit at their houses.

Milton might have been content with a victory which, as Gibbon said of his own, "over such an antagonist was a sufficient humiliation." Milton's magnanimity was no match for his irritation. He published a rejoinder to Morus's *Fides Publica*, reiterating his belief that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, but that it was no matter whether he was or not, since by publishing the book, and furnishing it with a recommendatory preface, he had made it his own. The charges against Morus' character he reiterated, and strengthened by new "facts," which Morus's enemies had hastened to contribute to the budget of calumny. These imputations on character, mixed with insinuations of unorthodoxy, such as are ever rife in clerical controversy, Milton invests with the moral indignation of a prophet denouncing the enemies of Jehovah. He expends a wealth of vituperative Latin which makes us tremble, till we remember that it is put in motion to crush an insect.

This *Pro se defensio* (Defence for himself), appeared in August, 1655. Morus met it by a supplementary *Fides Publica*, and Milton, resolved to have the last word, met him by a *Supplement to the Defence*. The reader will be glad to hear that this is the end of the Morus controversy. We leave Milton's victim buried under the mountains of opprobrious Latin here heaped upon him—this "circumforaneus pharmacopola, vanissimus circulator, propudium hominis et prostibulum."

CHAPTER XI.

LATIN SECRETARYSHIP COMES TO AN END—MILTON'S FRIENDS.

It is no part of Milton's biography to relate the course of public events in these momentous years, merely because as Latin secretary he formulated the despatches of the Protector or of his Council, and because these Latin letters are incorporated in Milton's works. On the course of affairs Milton's voice had no influence, as he had no part in their transaction. Milton was the last man of whom a practical politician would have sought advice. He knew nothing of the temper of the nation, and treated all that opposed his own view with supreme disdain. On the other hand, idealist though he was, he does not move in the sphere of speculative politics, or count among those philosophic names, a few in each century, who have influenced, not action but thought. Accordingly his opinions have for us a purely personal interest. They are part of the character of the poet Milton, and do not belong to either world, of action or of mind.

The course of his political convictions up to 1654 has been traced in our narrative thus far. His breeding at

home, at school, at college, was that of a member of the Established Church, but of the Puritan and Calvinistic, not of the Laudian and Arminian, party within its pale. By 1641, we find that his Puritanism has developed into Presbyterianism; he desires, not to destroy the Church, but to reform it by abolishing government by bishops, and substituting the Scotch or Genevan discipline. When he wrote his *Reason of Church Government* (1642), he is still a royalist; not in the cavalier sense of a person attached to the reigning sovereign, or the Stuart family, but still retaining the belief of his age that monarchy in the abstract had somewhat of divine sanction. Before 1649, the divine right of monarchy, and the claim of Presbytery to be scriptural, have yielded in his mind to a wider conception of the rights of the man and the Christian. To use the party names of the time, Milton the Presbyterian has expanded into Milton the Independent. There is to be no State Church, and instead of a monarchy there is to be a commonwealth. Very soon the situation developes the important question how this commonwealth shall be administered—whether by a representative assembly, or by a picked council, or a single governor. This question was put to a test in the Parliament of 1654. The experiment of a representative assembly, begun in September 1654, broke down in January 1655. Before it was tried we find Milton in his *Second Defence*, in May 1654, recommending Cromwell to govern not by a Parliament, but by a council of officers; i. e. he is a commonwealth's man. Arrived at this point, would Milton take his stand upon doctrinaire republicanism, and lose sight of liberty in the attempt to secure equality, as his friends Vane, Overton, Bradshaw would have done? Or would his idealist exaltation sweep

him on into some one of the current fanaticisms, Leveller, Fifth Monarchy, or Muggletonian? Unpractical as he was, he was close enough to State affairs as Latin Secretary, to see that personal government by the Protector was, at the moment, the only solution. If the liberties that had been conquered by the sword were to be maintained, between levelling chaos on the one hand, and royalist reaction on the other, it was the Protector alone to whom those who prized liberty above party names could look. Accordingly Milton may be regarded from the year 1654 onwards as an Oliverian, though with particular reservations. He saw—it was impossible for a man in his situation not to see—the unavoidable necessity which forced Cromwell, at this moment, to undertake to govern without a representative assembly. The political necessity of the situation was absolute, and all reasonable men who were embarked in the cause felt it to be so.

Through all these stages Milton passed in the space of twenty years—Church-Puritan, Presbyterian, Royalist, Independent, Commonwealth's man, Oliverian. These political phases were not the acquiescence of a placeman, or indifferentist, in mutations for which he does not care; still less were they changes either of party or of opinion. Whatever he thought, Milton thought and felt intensely, and expressed emphatically; and even his enemies could not accuse him of a shadow of inconsistency or wavering in his principles. On the contrary, tenacity, or persistence of idea, amounted in him to a serious defect of character. A conviction once formed dominated him, so that, as in the controversy with Morus, he could not be persuaded that he had made a mistake. No mind, the history of which we have an opportunity of intimately studying,

could be more of one piece and texture than was that of Milton from youth to age. The names, which we are obliged to give to his successive political stages, do not indicate shades of colour adopted from the prevailing political ground, but the genuine development of the public consciousness of Puritan England repeated in an individual. Milton moved forward, not because Cromwell and the rest advanced, but with Cromwell and the rest. We may perhaps describe the motive force as a passionate attachment to personal liberty, liberty of thought and action. This ideal force working in the minds of a few, "those worthies which are the soul of that enterprise" (*Tenure of Kings*), had been the mainspring of the whole revolution. The Levellers, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy men, and the wilder Anabaptist sects, only showed the workings of the same idea in men, whose intellects had not been disciplined by education or experience. The idea of liberty, formulated into a doctrine, and bowed down to as a holy creed, made some of its best disciples, such as Harrison and Overton, useless at the most critical juncture. The party of anti-Oliverian republicans, the Intransigentes, became one of the greatest difficulties of the Government. Milton, with his idealism, his thoroughness, and obstinate persistence, was not unlikely to have shipwrecked upon the same rock. He was saved by his constancy to the principle of religious liberty, which was found with the party that had destroyed the King because he would not be ruled by a Parliament, while in 1655 it supported the Protector in governing without a Parliament. Supreme authority in itself was not Cromwell's aim; he used it only to secure the fulfilment of those ideas of religious liberty, civil order, and Protestant ascendancy in Europe, which filled his whole soul. To

Milton, as to Cromwell, forms, whether of worship or government, were but means to an end, and were to be changed whenever expediency might require.

In 1655, then, Milton was an Oliverian, but with reservations. The most important of these reservations regarded the relation of the state to the church. Cromwell never wholly dropped the scheme of a national church. It was, indeed, to be as comprehensive as possible; Episcopacy was pulled down, Presbytery was not set up, but individual ministers might be Episcopalian or Presbyterian in sentiment, provided they satisfied a certain standard, intelligible enough to that generation, of "godliness." Here Milton seems to have remained throughout upon the old Independent platform; he will not have the civil power step over its limits into the province of religion at all. Many matters, in which the old prelatic church had usurped upon the domain of the state, should be replaced under the secular authority. But the spiritual region was matter of conscience, and not of external regulation.

A further reservation which Milton would make related to endowments, or the maintenance of ministers. The Protectorate, and the constitution of 1657, maintained an established clergy in the enjoyment of tithes or other settled stipends. Nothing was more abhorrent to Milton's sentiment than state payment in religious things. The minister who receives such pay becomes a state pensioner, "a hireling." The law of tithes is a Jewish law, repealed by the Gospel, under which the minister is only maintained by the freewill offerings of the congregation to which he ministers. This antipathy to hired preachers was one of Milton's earliest convictions. It thrusts itself, rather importunately, into *Lycidas* (1636), and reappears

in the Sonnet to Cromwell (*Sonnet* XVII., 1652), before it is dogmatically expounded in the pamphlet, *Considerations touching means to remove Hirelings out of the Church* (1659). Of the two corruptions of the church by the secular power, one by force, the other by pay, Milton regards the last as the most dangerous. "Under force, though no thank to the forcers, true religion ofttimes best thrives and flourishes; but the corruption of teachers, most commonly the effect of hire, is the very bane of truth in them who are so corrupted." Nor can we tax this aversion to a salaried ministry, with being a monomania of sect. It is essentially involved in the conception of religion as a spiritual state, a state of grace. A soul in this state can only be ministered to by a brother in a like frame of mind. To assign a place with a salary, is to offer a pecuniary inducement to simulate this qualification. This principle may be wrong, but it is not unreasonable. It is the very principle on which the England of our day has decided against the endowment of science. The endowment of the church was to Milton the poison of religion, and in so thinking he was but true to his conception of religion. Cromwell, whatever may have been his speculative opinions, decided in favour of a state endowment, upon the reasons, or some of them, which have moved modern statesmen to maintain church establishments.

With whatever reservations, Milton was an Oliverian. Supporting the Protector's policy, he admired his conduct, and has recorded his admiration in the memorable sonnet XII. How the Protector thought of Milton, or even that he knew him at all, there remains no evidence. Napoleon said of Corneille that, if he had lived in his day, he would have made him his first minister.

Milton's ideas were not such as could have value in the eyes of a practical statesman. Yet Cromwell was not always taking advice, or discussing business. He, who could take a liking for the genuine inwardness of the enthusiast George Fox, might have been expected to appreciate equal unworldliness, joined with culture and reading, in Milton. "If," says Neal, "there was a man in England who excelled in any faculty or science, the Protector would find him out and reward him." But the excellence which the Protector prized was aptness for public employment, and this was the very quality in which Milton was deficient.

The poverty of Milton's state letters has been often remarked. Whenever weighty negotiations are going on, other pens than his are employed. We may ascribe this to his blindness. Milton could only dictate, and therefore everything entrusted to him must pass through an amanuensis, who might blab. One exception to the commonplace character of the state papers there is. The massacre of the Vaudois by their own sovereign, Charles Emanuel II., Duke of Savoy, excited a thrill of horror in England greater than the massacres of Scio or of Batak roused in our time. For in Savoy it was not humanity only that was outraged, it was a deliberate assault of the Papal half of Europe upon an outpost of the Protestant cause.

One effect of the Puritan revolution had been to alter entirely the foreign policy of England. By nature, by geographical position, by commercial occupations, and the free spirit of the natives, these islands were marked out to be members of the northern confederacy of progressive and emancipated Europe. The foreign policy of Elisabeth had been steady adhesion to this

law of nature. The two first Stuarts, coquetting with semi-catholicism at home, had leaned with all the weight of the crown and of government towards catholic connexions. The country had always offered a vain resistance; the Parliament of 1621 had been dismissed for advising James to join the continental protestants against Spain. It was certain, therefore, that when the government became Puritan, its foreign policy would again become that of Elisabeth. This must have been the case even if Cromwell had not been there. He saw not only that England must be a partner in the general protestant interest, but that it fell to England to make the combination and to lead it. He acted in this with his usual decision. He placed England in her natural antagonism to Spain; he made peace with the Dutch; he courted the friendship of the Swiss Cantons, and the alliance of the Scandinavian and German Princes; and to France, which had a divided interest, he made advantageous offers provided the Cardinal would disconnect himself from the ultramontane party.

It was in April 1655, that the Vaudois atrocities suddenly added the impulse of religious sympathy to the permanent gravitation of the political forces. In all catholic countries the Jesuits had by this time made themselves masters of the councils of the princes. The aim of Jesuit policy in the seventeenth century was nothing less than the entire extirpation of protestantism and protestants in the countries which they ruled. The inhabitants of certain Piedmontese valleys had held from time immemorial, and long before Luther, tenets and forms of worship very like those to which the German reformers had sought to bring back the church. The Vaudois were wretchedly poor, and had been incessantly

the objects of aggression and persecution. In January 1655, a sudden determination was taken by the Turin government to make them conform to the catholic religion by force. The whole of the inhabitants of three valleys were ordered to quit the country within three days, under pain of death and confiscation of goods, unless they would become, or undertake to become, catholic. They sent their humble remonstrances to the court of Turin against this edict. The remonstrances were disregarded, and military execution was ordered. On April 17, 1655, the soldiers, recruits from all countries—the Irish are specially mentioned—were let loose upon the unarmed population. Murder and rape and burning are the ordinary incidents of military execution. These were not enough to satisfy the ferocity of the catholic soldiery, who revelled for many days in the infliction of all that brutal lust or savage cruelty can suggest to men.

It was nearly a month before the news reached England. A cry of horror went through the country, and Cromwell said it came "as near his heart as if his own nearest and dearest had been concerned." A day of humiliation was appointed, large collections were made for the sufferers, and a special envoy was despatched to remonstrate with the Duke of Savoy. Cardinal Mazarin, however, seeing the importance which the Lord Protector would acquire by taking the lead on this occasion, stepped in, and patched up a hasty arrangement, the treaty of Pignerol, by which some sort of fallacious protection was ostensibly secured to the survivors of the massacre.

All the despatches in this business were composed by Milton. But he only found the words; especially in the letter to the Duke of Savoy, the tone of which is much more moderate than we should have expected, consider-

ing that Blake was in the Mediterranean, and master of the coasts of the Duke's dominions. It is impossible to extract from these letters any characteristic trait, unless it is from the speech which the envoy, Morland, was instructed to deliver at Turin, in which it is said that all the Neros of all ages had never contrived inhumanities so atrocious, as what had taken place in the Vaudois valleys. Thus restricted in his official communications, Milton gave vent to his personal feelings on the occasion in the well-known sonnet (XVIII.) "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold."

It has been already said that there remains no trace of any personal intercourse between Milton and Cromwell. He seems to have remained equally unknown to, or unregarded by, the other leading men in the Government or the Council. It is vain to conjecture the cause of this general neglect. Some have found it in the coldness with which Milton regarded, parts at least of, the policy of the Protectorate. Others refer it to the haughty nature of the man, who will neither ask a favour, nor make the first advances towards intimacy. This last supposition is nearer the truth than the former. An expression he uses in a private letter may be cited in its support. Writing to Peter Heimbach in 1657, to excuse himself from giving him a recommendation to the English ambassador in Holland, he says: "I am sorry that I am not able to do this; I have very little acquaintance with those in power, inasmuch as I keep very much to my own house, and prefer to do so." Something may also be set down to the character of the Puritan leaders, alien to all poetry, and knowing no books but the Bible.

The mental isolation in which the great poet lived his

life, is a remarkable feature of his biography. It was not only after the Restoration that he appears lonely and friendless; it was much the same during the previous period of the Parliament and the Protectorate. Just at one time, about 1641, we hear from our best authority, Phillips, of his cultivating the society of men of his own age, and "keeping a gawdy-day," but this only once in three weeks or a month, with "two gentlemen of Gray's Inn." He had, therefore, known what it was to be sociable. But the general tenour of his life was other; proud, reserved, self-contained, repellent; brooding over his own ideas, not easily admitting into his mind the ideas of others. It is indeed an erroneous estimate of Milton to attribute to him a hard or austere nature. He had all the quick sensibility which belongs to the poetic temperament, and longed to be loved that he might love again. But he had to pay the penalty of all who believe in their own ideas, in that their ideas come between them and the persons that approach them, and constitute a mental barrier which can only be broken down by sympathy. And sympathy for ideas is hard to find, just in proportion as those ideas are profound, far-reaching, the fruit of long study and meditation. Hence it was that Milton did not associate readily with his contemporaries, but was affable and instructive in conversation with young persons, and those who would approach him in the attitude of disciples. His daughter Deborah, who could tell so little about him, remembered that he was delightful company, the life of a circle, and that he was so, through a flow of subjects, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility. I would interpret this testimony, the authenticity of which is indisputable, of his demeanour with the young, and those who were modest enough to

wait upon his utterances. His isolation from his coevals, and from those who offered resistance, was the necessary consequence of his force of character, and the moral tenacity which endured no encroachment on the narrow scheme of thought, over which it was incessantly brooding.

Though, as Johnson says, "his literature was immense," there was no humanity in it; it was fitted immovably into a scholastic frame-work. Hence it was no bond of sympathy between him and other men. We find him in no intimate relation with any of the contemporary men of learning, poets, or wits. From such of them as were of the cavalier party he was estranged by politics. That it was Milton's interposition which saved Davenant's life in 1651, even were the story better authenticated than it is, is not an evidence of intimacy. The three men most eminent for learning (in the usually received sense of the word) in England at that day were Selden (d. 1654), Gataker (d. 1654), and Archbishop Usher (d. 1656), all of whom were to be found in London. With none of the three is there any trace of Milton ever having had intercourse.

It is probable, but not certain, that it was at Milton's intercession that the Council proposed to subsidise Brian Walton in his great enterprise—the Polyglott Bible. This, the noblest monument of the learning of the Anglican Church, was projected and executed by the silenced clergy. Fifteen years of spoliation and humiliation thus bore richer fruit of learning than the two centuries of wealth and honour which have since elapsed. As Brian Walton had, at one time, been curate of Allhallows, Bread Street, Milton may have known him, and it has been inferred that by Twells' expression—"The Council of

state, before whom *some*, having *relation to them*, brought this business"—Milton is meant.

Not with John Hales, Cudworth, Whichcote, Nicholas Bernard, Meric Casaubon, nor with any of the men of letters who were churchmen, do we find Milton in correspondence. The interest of religion was more powerful than the interest of knowledge; and the author of *Eikonoklastes* must have been held in special abhorrence by the loyal clergy. The general sentiment of this party is expressed in Hacket's tirade, for which the reader is referred to his Life of Archbishop Williams.

From Presbyterians, such as Theophilus Gale or Baxter, Milton was equally separated by party. Of Hobbes, Milton's widow told Aubrey "that he was not of his acquaintance; that her husband did not like him at all, but would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts."

Owing to these circumstances, the circle of Milton's intimates contains few, and those undistinguished names. One exception there was. In Andrew Marvel Milton found one congenial spirit, incorruptible amid poverty, unbowed by defeat. Marvel was twelve years Milton's junior, and a Cambridge man (Trinity), like himself. He had had better training still, having been for two years an inmate of Nunappleton, in the capacity of instructor to Mary, only daughter of the great Lord Fairfax. In 1652, Milton had recommended Marvel for the appointment of assistant secretary to himself, now that he was partially disabled by his blindness. The recommendation was not effectual at the time, another man, Philip Meadows, obtaining the post. It was not till 1657, when Meadows was sent on a mission to Denmark, that Marvel became Milton's colleague. He remained attached to him to the last. It were to be wished that he had left some

reminiscences of his intercourse with the poet in his later years, some authentic notice of him in his prose letters, instead of a copy of verses, which attest, at least, his affectionate admiration for Milton's great epic, though they are a poor specimen of his own poetical efforts.

Of Marchmont Needham, and Samuel Hartlib mention has been already made. During the eight years of his sojourn in the house in Petty France, "he was frequently visited by persons of quality," says Phillips. The only name he gives is Lady Ranelagh. This lady, by birth a Boyle, sister of Robert Boyle, had placed first her nephew, and then her son, under Milton's tuition. Of an excellent understanding, and liberally cultivated, she sought Milton's society, and as he could not go to visit her, she went to him. There are no letters of Milton addressed to her, but he mentions her once as "a most superior woman," and when, in 1656, she left London for Ireland, he "grieves for the loss of the one acquaintance which was worth to him all the rest." These names, with that of Dr. Paget, exhaust the scanty list of Milton's intimates during this period.

To these older friends, however, must be added his former pupils, now become men, but remaining ever attached to their old tutor, seeing him often when in London, and when absent corresponding with him. With them he was "affable and instructive in conversation." Henry Lawrence, son of the President of Oliver's Council, and Cyriac Skinner, grandson of Chief Justice Coke, were special favourites. With these he would sometimes "by the fire help waste a sullen day;" and it was these two who called forth from him the only utterances of this time which are not solemn, serious, or sad. Sonnet XVI is a poetical invitation to Henry Lawrence, "of virtuous

father virtuous son," to a "neat repast," not without wine and song, to cheer the winter season. Besides these two, whose names are familiar to us through the Sonnets, there was Lady Ranelagh's son, Richard Jones, who went, in 1656, to Oxford, attended by his tutor, the German Heinrich Oldenburg. We have two letters (Latin) addressed to Jones at Oxford, which are curious as showing that Milton was as dissatisfied with that university even after the reform, with Oliver Chancellor, and Owen Vice-Chancellor, as he had been with Cambridge.

His two nephews, also his pupils, must have ceased at a very early period to be acceptable either as friends or companions. They had both—but the younger brother, John, more decidedly than Edward—passed into the opposite camp. This is a result of the uncle's strict system of Puritan discipline, which will surprise no one who has observed that, in education, mind reacts against the pressure of will. The teacher who seeks to impose his views raises antagonists, and not disciples. The generation of young men who grew up under the Commonwealth were in intellectual revolt against the constraint of Puritanism, before they proceeded to political revolution against its authority. Long before the reaction embodied itself in the political fact of the Restoration, it had manifested itself in popular literature. The theatres were still closed by the police, but Davenant found a public in London to applaud an "entertainment by declamations and music, after the manner of the ancients" (1656). The press began timidly to venture on books of amusement, in a style of humour which seemed ribald and heathenish to the staid and sober covenanter. Something of the jollity and merriment of old Elisabethan days seemed to be in the air. But with a vast difference. Instead of "dally-

ing with the innocence of love," as in *England's Helicon* (1600), or *The Passionate Pilgrim*, the sentiment, crushed and maimed by unwise repression, found a less honest and less refined expression. The strongest and most universal of human passions when allowed freedom, light, and air, becomes poetic inspiration. The same passion coerced by police is but driven underground.

So it came to pass that, in these years, the Protector's Council of state was much exercised by attempts of the London press to supply the public, weary of sermons, with some light literature of the class now (1879) known as facetious. On April 25, 1656, the august body which had upon its hands the government of three kingdoms and the protection of the protestant interest militant throughout Europe, could find nothing better to do than to take into consideration a book entitled *Sportive Wit, or The Muse's Merriment.* Sad to relate, the book was found to contain "much lascivious and profane matter." And the editor?—no other than John Phillips, Milton's youngest nephew! It is as if nature, in reasserting herself, had made deliberate selection of its agent. The pure poet of *Comus*, the man who had publicly boasted his chastity, had trained up a pupil to become the editor of an immodest drollery! Another and more original production of John Phillips, the *Satyr against Hypocrites*, was an open attack, with mixed banter and serious indignation, on the established religion. "It affords," says Godwin, "unequivocal indication of the company now kept by the author with cavaliers, and *bon vivans*, and demireps, and men of ruined fortunes." Edward Phillips, the elder brother, followed suit with the *Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658), a book, according to Godwin, "entitled to no insignificant rank among

the multifarious productions issued from the press, to debauch the manners of the nation, and to bring back the King." Truly, a man's worst vexations come to him from his own relations. Milton had the double annoyance of the public exposure before the Council of State, and the private reflection on the failure of his own system of education.

The homage which was wanting to the prophet in his own country was more liberally tendered by foreigners. Milton, it must be remembered, was yet only known in England as the pamphleteer of strong republican, but somewhat eccentric, opinions. On the continent he was the answerer of Salmasius, the vindicator of liberty against despotic power. "Learned foreigners of note," Phillips tells us, "could not part out of this city without giving a visit" to his uncle. Aubrey even exaggerates this flocking of the curious, so far as to say that some came over into England only to see Oliver Protector and John Milton. That Milton had more than he liked of these sightseers, who came to look at him when he could not see them, we can easily believe. Such visitors would of course be from protestant countries. Italians, though admiring his elegant Latin, had "disliked him on account of his too severe morals." A glimpse, and no more than a glimpse, of the impression such visitors could carry away, we obtain in a letter written, in 1651, by a Nüremberg pastor, Christoph Arnold, to a friend at home:— "The strenuous defender of the new *régime*, Milton, enters readily into conversation; his speech is pure, his written style very pregnant. He has committed himself to a harsh, not to say unjust, criticism of the old English divines, and of their Scripture commentaries, which are truly learned, be witness the genius of learning himself!"

It must not be supposed from this that Milton had discoursed with Arnold on the English divines. The allusion is to that onfall upon the reformers, Cranmer, Latimer, &c., which had escaped from Milton's pen in 1642 to the great grief of his friends. If the information of a dissenting minister, one Thomas Bradbury, who professed to derive it from Jeremiah White, one of Oliver's chaplains, may be trusted, Milton "was allowed by the Parliament a weekly table for the entertainment of foreign ministers and persons of learning, such especially as came from protestant states, which allowance was also continued by Cromwell."

Such homage, though it may be a little tiresome, may have gratified for the moment the political writer, but it would not satisfy the poet who was dreaming of an immortality of far other fame—

> Two equal'd with me in fate,
> So were I equal'd with them in renown.

And to one with Milton's acute sensibility, yearning for sympathy and love, dependent, through his calamity, on the eyes, as on the heart, of others, his domestic interior was of more consequence than outside demonstrations of respect. Four years after the death of his first wife he married again. We know nothing more of this second wife, Catharine Woodcock, than what may be gathered from the Sonnet XIX. in which he commemorated his "late espoused saint," in whose person "love, sweetness, goodness shin'd." After only fifteen months union she died (1658), after having given birth to a daughter, who lived only a few months. Milton was again alone.

His public functions as Latin Secretary had been con-

tracted within narrow limits by his blindness. The heavier part of the duties had been transferred to others, first to Weckherlin, then to Philip Meadows, and lastly to Andrew Marvel. The more confidential diplomacy Thurloe reserved for his own cabinet. But Milton continued up to the last to be occasionally called upon for a Latin epistle. On September 3, 1658, passed away the master-mind which had hitherto compelled the jarring elements in the nation to co-exist together, and chaos was let loose. Milton retained and exercised his secretaryship under Richard Protector, and even under the restored Parliament. His latest Latin letter is of date May 16, 1659. He is entirely outside all the combinations and complications which filled the latter half of that year, after Richard's retirement in May. It is little use writing to foreign potentates now, for, with one man's life, England has fallen from her lead in Europe, and is gravitating towards the catholic and reactionary powers, France or Spain. Milton, though he knows nothing more than one of the public, "only what it appears to us without doors," he says, will yet write about it. The habit of pamphleteering was on him, and he will write what no one will care to read. The stiff-necked commonwealth men, with their doctrinaire republicanism, were standing out for their constitutional ideas, blind to the fact that the royalists were all the while undermining the ground beneath the feet alike of Presbyterian and Independent, Parliament and army. The Greeks of Constantinople denouncing the Azymite, when Mohammed II. was forming his lines round the doomed city, were not more infatuated than these pedantic commonwealth men with their parliamentarianism when Charles II. was at Calais.

Not less inopportune than the public men of the party,

Milton chooses this time for inculcating his views on endowments. A fury of utterance was upon him, and he poured out, during the death-throes of the republic, pamphlet upon pamphlet, as fast as he could get them written to his dictation. These extemporised effusions betray in their style, hurry and confusion, the restlessness of a coming despair. The passionate enthusiasm of the early tracts is gone, and all the old faults, the obscurity, the inconsecutiveness, the want of arrangement, are exaggerated. In the *Ready Way* there is a monster sentence of thirty-nine lines, containing 336 words. Though his instincts were perturbed, he was unaware what turn things were taking. In February 1660, when all persons of ordinary information saw that the restoration of monarchy was certain, Milton knew it not, and put out a tract to show his countrymen a *Ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth*. With the same pertinacity with which he had adhered to his own assumption that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, he now refused to believe in the return of the Stuarts. Fast as his pen moved, events outstripped it, and he has to rewrite the *Ready and easy way* to suit their march. The second edition is overtaken by the Restoration, and it should seem was never circulated. Milton will ever "give advice to Sylla," and writes a letter of admonition to Monk, which, however, never reached either the press or Sylla.

The month of May 1660, put a forced end to his illusion. Before the 29th of that month he had fled from the house in Petty France, and been sheltered by a friend in the city. In this friend's house, in Bartholomew Close, he lay concealed till the passing of the Act of Oblivion, 29th August. Phillips says that he owed his

exemption from the vengeance which overtook so many of his friends, to Andrew Marvel, "who acted vigorously in his behalf, and made a considerable party for him." But in adding that "he was so far excepted as not to bear any office in the commonwealth," Phillips is in error. Milton's name does not occur in the Act. Pope used to tell that Davenant had employed his interest to protect a brother-poet, thus returning a similar act of generosity done to himself by Milton in 1650. Pope had this story from Betterton the actor. How far Davenant exaggerated to Betterton his own influence or his exertions, we cannot tell. Another account assigns the credit of the intervention to Secretary Morris and Sir Thomas Clarges. After all, it is probable that he owed his immunity to his insignificance and his harmlessness. The formality of burning two of his books by the hands of the hangman was gone through. He was also for some time during the autumn of 1660 in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms, for on 15th December, there is an entry in the Commons journals ordering his discharge. It is characteristic of Milton that, even in this moment of peril, he stood up for his rights, and refused to pay an overcharge, which the official thought he might safely exact from a rebel and a covenanter.

THIRD PERIOD. 1660—1674.

CHAPTER XII.

BIOGRAPHICAL.—LITERARY OCCUPATION.—RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

Revolutions are of two kinds; they are either progressive or reactionary. A revolution of progress is often destructive, sweeping away much which should have been preserved. But such a revolution has a regenerating force; it renews the youth of a nation, and gives free play to its vital powers. Lost limbs are replaced by new. A revolution of reaction, on the other hand, is a benumbing influence, paralysing effort, and levelling character. In such a conservative revolution the mean, the selfish, and the corrupt come to the top; man seeks ease and enjoyment rather than duty; virtue, honour, patriotism, and disinterestedness disappear altogether from a society which has ceased to believe in them.

The Restoration of 1660 was such a revolution. Complete and instantaneous inversion of the position of the two parties in the nation, it occasioned much individual hardship. But this was only the fortune of war, the necessary consequence of party ascendancy. The Restoration was much more than a triumph of the party of the royalists over that of the roundheads; it was the deathblow to

national aspiration, to all those aims which raise man above himself. It destroyed and trampled under foot his ideal. The Restoration was a moral catastrophe. It was not that there wanted good men among the churchmen, men as pious and virtuous as the Puritans whom they displaced. But the royalists came back as the party of reaction, reaction of the spirit of the world against asceticism, of self-indulgence against duty, of materialism against idealism. For a time virtue was a public laughing-stock, and the word "saint," the highest expression in the language for moral perfection, connoted everything that was ridiculous. I do not speak of the gallantries of Whitehall, which figure so prominently in the histories of the reign. Far too much is made of these, when they are made the scapegoat of the moralist. The style of court manners was a mere incident on the surface of social life. The national life was more profoundly tainted by the discouragement of all good men, which penetrated every shire and every parish, than by the distant reports of the loose behaviour of Charles II. Servility, meanness, venality, time-serving, and a disbelief in virtue diffused themselves over the nation like a pestilential miasma, the depressing influence of which was heavy, even upon those souls which individually resisted the poison. The heroic age of England had passed away, not by gradual decay, by imperceptible degeneration, but in a year, in a single day, like the winter's snow in Greece. It is for the historian to describe, and unfold the sources of this contagion. The biographer of Milton has to take note of the political change only as it affected the worldly circumstances of the man, the spiritual environment of the poet, and the springs of his inspiration.

The consequences of the Restoration to Milton's worldly

fortunes were disastrous. As a partisan he was necessarily involved in the ruin of his party. As a matter of course he lost his Latin secretaryship. There is a story that he was offered to be continued in it, and that when urged to accept the offer by his wife, he replied, "Thou art in the right; you, as other women, would ride in your coach; for me, my aim is to live and die an honest man." This tradition, handed on by Pope, is of doubtful authenticity. It is not probable that the man who had printed of Charles I. what Milton had printed, could have been offered office under Charles II. Even were court favour to be purchased by concessions, Milton was not the man to make them, or to belie his own antecedents, as Marchmont Needham, Dryden, and so many others did. Our wish for Milton is that he should have placed himself from the beginning above party. But he had chosen to be the champion of a party, and he loyally accepted the consequences. He escaped with life and liberty. The reaction, though barbarous in its treatment of its victims, was not bloodthirsty. Milton was already punished by the loss of his sight, and he was now mulcted in three-fourths of his small fortune. A sum of 2000*l.* which he had placed in government securities was lost, the restored monarchy refusing to recognise the obligations of the protectorate. He lost another like sum by mismanagement, and for want of good advice, says Phillips, or according to his granddaughter's statement, by the dishonesty of a money-scrivener. He had also to give up, without compensation, some property, valued at 60*l.* a year, which he had purchased when the estates of the Chapter of Westminster were sold. In the great fire, 1666, his house in Bread-street was destroyed. Thus, from easy circumstances, he was reduced, if not to destitution, at least to narrow means. He left at his death

1500*l.*, which Phillips calls a considerable sum. And if he sold his books, one by one, during his lifetime, this was because, knowing their value, he thought he could dispose of them to greater advantage than his wife would be able to do.

But far outweighing such considerations as pecuniary ruin, and personal discomfort, was the shock which the moral nature felt from the irretrievable discomfiture of all the hopes, aims, and aspirations which had hitherto sustained and nourished his soul. In a few months the labour of twenty years was swept away without a trace of it being left. It was not merely a political defeat of his party, it was the total wreck of the principles, of the social and religious ideal, with which Milton's life was bound up. Others, whose convictions only had been engaged in the cause, could hasten to accommodate themselves to the new era, or even to transfer their services to the conqueror. But such flighty allegiance was not possible for Milton, who had embarked in the Puritan cause not only intellectual convictions, but all the generosity and ardour of his passionate nature. "I conceive myself to be," he had written in 1642, "not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded, and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker." It was now in the moment of overthrow that Milton became truly great. "Wandellos im ewigen Ruin," he stood alone, and became the party himself. He took the only course open to him, turned away his thoughts from the political disaster, and directed the fierce enthusiasm which burned within, upon an absorbing poetic task. His outward hopes were blasted, and he returned with concentrated ardour to woo the muse, from whom he had so long truanted. The passion which seethes beneath the stately march of the verse in *Paradise Lost*, is not the

hopeless moan of despair, but the intensified fanaticism which defies misfortune to make it "bate one jot of heart or hope." The grand loneliness of Milton after 1668, "is reflected in his three great poems by a sublime independence of human sympathy, like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us" (*Lowell*).

Late then, but not too late, Milton, at the age of fifty-two, fell back upon the rich resources of his own mind, upon poetical composition, and the study of good books, which he always asserted to be necessary to nourish and sustain a poet's imagination. Here he had to contend with the enormous difficulty of blindness. He engaged a kind of attendant to read to him. But this only sufficed for English books—imperfectly even for these—and the greater part of the choice, not extensive, library upon which Milton drew, was Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the modern languages of Europe. In a letter to Heimbach, of date 1666, he complains pathetically of the misery of having to spell out, letter by letter, the Latin words of the epistle, to the attendant who was writing to his dictation. At last he fell upon the plan of engaging young friends, who occasionally visited him, to read to him and to write for him. In the precious volume of Milton MSS. preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, six different hands have been distinguished. Who they were is not always known. But Phillips tells us that, "he had daily about him one or other to read to him; some persons of man's estate, who of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his reader, that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, as oblige him by the benefit of their reading; others of younger years sent by their parents to the same end." Edward Phillips himself, who visited his uncle to the last, may

have been among the number, as much as his own engagements as tutor, first to the only son of John Evelyn, then in the family of the Earl of Pembroke, and finally to the Bennets, Lord Arlington's children, would permit him. Others of these casual readers were Samuel Barrow, body physician to Charles II., and Cyriac Skinner, of whom mention has been already made (above, p. 132).

To a blind man, left with three little girls, of whom the youngest was only eight at the Restoration, marriage seemed equally necessary for their sake as for his own. Milton consulted his judicious friend and medical adviser, Dr. Paget, who recommended to him Elizabeth Minshull, of a family of respectable position near Nantwich, in Cheshire. She was some distant relation of Paget, who must have felt the terrible responsibility of undertaking to recommend. She justified his selection. The marriage took place in February 1663, and during the remaining eleven years of his life, the poet was surrounded by the thoughtful attentions of an active and capable woman. There is but scanty evidence as to what she was like, either in person or character. Aubrey, who knew her, says she was "a gent. (? genteel) person, (of) a peaceful and agreeable humour." Newton, Bishop of Bristol, who wrote in 1749, had heard that she was "a woman of a most violent spirit, and a hard mother-in-law to his children." It is certain that she regarded her husband with great veneration, and studied his comfort. Mary Fisher, a maid-servant in the house, deposed that at the end of his life, when he was sick and infirm, his wife having provided something for dinner she thought he would like, he "spake to his said wife these or like words, as near as this deponent can remember: 'God have mercy, Betty, I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise, in providing

me such dishes as I think fit while I live, and when I die thou knowest I have left thee all.'" There is no evidence that his wife rendered him literary assistance. Perhaps, as she looked so thoroughly to his material comfort, her function was held, by tacit agreement, to end there.

As casual visitors, or volunteer readers, were not always in the way, and a hired servant who could not spell Latin was of very restricted use, it was not unnatural that Milton should look to his daughters, as they grew up, to take a share in supplying his voracious demand for intellectual food. Anne, the eldest, though she had handsome features, was deformed and had an impediment in her speech, which made her unavailable as a reader. The other two, Mary and Deborah, might now have been of inestimable service to their father, had their dispositions led them to adapt themselves to his needs, and the circumstances of the house. Unfortunate it was for Milton, that his biblical views on the inferiority of woman had been reduced to practice in the bringing up of his own daughters. It cannot indeed be said that the poet whose imagination created the Eve of *Paradise Lost*, regarded woman as the household drudge, existing only to minister to man's wants. Of all that men have said of women nothing is more loftily conceived than the well-known passage at the end of Book viii. :—

> When I approach
> Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,
> And in herself complete, so well to know
> Her own, that what she wills to do or say
> Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded; wisdom in discourse with her
> Loses discountenanc'd, and like folly shows;
> Authority and reason on her wait,
> As one intended first, not after made

> Occasionally; and, to consummate all,
> Greatness of mind, and nobleness, their seat
> Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
> About her, as a guard angelic plac'd.

Bishop Newton thought that, in drawing Eve, Milton had in mind his third wife, because she had hair of the colour of Eve's "golden tresses." But Milton had never seen Elizabeth Minshull. If reality suggested any trait, physical or mental, of the Eve, it would certainly have been some woman seen in earlier years.

But wherever Milton may have met with an incarnation of female divinity such as he has drawn, it was not in his own family. We cannot but ask, how is it that one, whose type of woman is the loftiest known to English literature, should have brought up his own daughters on so different a model? Milton is not one of the false prophets, who turn round and laugh at their own enthusiasms, who say one thing in their verses, and another thing over their cups. What he writes in his poetry is what he thinks, what he means, and what he will do. But in directing the bringing up of his daughters, he put his own typical woman entirely on one side. His practice is framed on the principle that

> Nothing lovelier can be found
> In woman, than to study household good.
> *Paradise Lost*, ix. 233.

He did not allow his daughters to learn any language, saying with a gibe that one tongue was enough for a woman. They were not sent to any school, and had some sort of teaching at home from a mistress. But in order to make them useful in reading to him, their father was at the pains to train them to read aloud in five or six languages,

of none of which they understood one word. When we think of the time and labour which must have been expended to teach them to do this, it must occur to us that a little more labour would have sufficed to teach them so much of one or two of the languages, as would have made their reading a source of interest and improvement to themselves. This Milton refused to do. The consequence was, as might have been expected, the occupation became so irksome to them, that they rebelled against it. In the case of one of them, Mary, who was like her mother in person, and took after her in other respects, this restiveness passed into open revolt. She first resisted, then neglected, and finally came to hate, her father. When some one spoke in her presence of her father's approaching marriage, she said "that was no news to hear of his wedding; but if she could hear of his death, that was something." She combined with Anne, the eldest daughter, "to counsel his maidservant to cheat him in his marketings." They sold his books without his knowledge. "They made nothing of deserting him," he was often heard to complain. They continued to live with him five or six years after his marriage. But at last the situation became intolerable to both parties, and they were sent out to learn embroidery in gold or silver, as a means of obtaining their livelihood. Deborah, the youngest, was included in the same arrangement, though she seems to have been more helpful to her father, and to have been at one time his principal reader. Aubrey says that he "taught her Latin, and that she was his amanuensis." She even spoke of him when she was old—she lived to be seventy-four—with some tenderness. She was once, in 1725, shewn Faithorne's crayon drawing of the poet, without being told for whom it was intended. She immediately exclaimed,

"O Lord! that is the picture of my father!" and stroking down the hair of her forehead, added, "Just so my father wore his hair."

One of Milton's volunteer readers, and one to whom we owe the most authentic account of him in his last years, was a young Quaker, named Thomas Ellwood. Milton's Puritanism had been all his life slowly gravitating in the direction of more and more liberty, and though he would not attach himself to any sect, he must have felt in no remote sympathy with men who repudiated state interference in religious matters, and disdained ordinances. Some such sympathy with the pure spirituality of the Quaker may have disposed Milton favourably towards Ellwood. The acquaintance once begun, was cemented by mutual advantage. Milton, besides securing an intelligent reader, had a pleasure in teaching; and Ellwood, though the reverse of humble, was teachable from desire to expand himself. Ellwood took a lodging near the poet, and went to him every day, except "first-day," in the afternoon, to read Latin to him.

Milton's frequent change of abode has been thought indicative of a restless temperament, seeking escape from petty miseries by change of scene. On emerging from hiding, or escaping from the serjeant-at-arms in 1660, he lived for a short time in Holborn, near Red Lion Square. From this he removed to Jewin Street, and moved again, on his marriage, in 1662, to the house of Millington, the bookseller, who was now beginning business, but who, before his death in 1704, had accumulated the largest stock of second-hand books to be found in London. His last remove was to a house in a newly-created row facing the Artillery-ground, on the site of the west side of what is now called Bunhill Row. This was his abode from his

marriage till his death, nearly twelve years, a longer stay than he had made in any other residence. This is the house which must be associated with the poet of *Paradise Lost*, as it was here that the poem was in part written, and wholly revised and finished. But the Bunhill Row house is only producible by the imagination ; every trace of it has long been swept away, though the name Milton Street, bestowed upon a neighbouring street, preserves the remembrance of the poet's connexion with the locality. Here "an ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber, hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black ; pale, but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk-stones." At the door of this house, sitting in the sun, looking out upon the Artillery-ground, "in a grey coarse cloth coat," he would receive his visitors. On colder days he would walk for hours—three or four hours at a time, in his garden. A garden was a *sine qua non*, and he took care to have one to every house he lived in.

His habit in early life had been to study late into the night. After he lost his sight, he changed his hours, and retired to rest at nine. In summer he rose at four, in winter at five, and began the day with having the Hebrew Scriptures read to him. "Then he contemplated. At seven his man came to him again, and then read to him and wrote till dinner. The writing was as much as the reading" (Aubrey). Then he took exercise, either walking in the garden, or swinging in a machine. His only recreation, besides conversation, was music. He played the organ and the bass viol, the organ most. Sometimes he would sing himself or get his wife to sing to him, though she had, he said, no ear, yet a good voice. Then he went up to his study to be read to till six. After six his friends were admitted to visit him, and would sit with

him till eight. At eight he went down to supper, usually olives or some light thing. He was very abstemious in his diet, having to contend with a gouty diathesis. He was not fastidious in his choice of meats, but content with anything that was in season, or easy to be procured. After supping thus sparingly, he smoked a pipe of tobacco, drank a glass of water, and then retired to bed. He was sparing in his use of wine. His Samson, who in this as in other things, is Milton himself, allays his thirst "from the clear milky juice."

Bed with its warmth and recumbent posture he found favourable to composition. At other times he would compose or prune his verses, as he walked in the garden, and then, coming in, dictate. His verse was not at the command of his will. Sometimes he would lie awake the whole night, trying but unable to make a single line. At other times lines flowed without premeditation "with a certain impetus and œstro." What was his season of inspiration is somewhat uncertain. In the elegy "To Spring," Milton says it was the spring which restored his poetic faculty. Phillips, however, says, "that his vein never flowed happily but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal," and that the poet told him this. Phillips' reminiscence is perhaps true at the date of *Paradise Lost*, when Milton's habits had changed from what they had been at twenty. Or we may agree with Toland, that Phillips has transposed the seasons, though preserving the fact of intermittent inspiration. What he composed at night, he dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm. He would dictate forty lines, as it were in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number.

Milton's piety is admitted, even by his enemies; and it is a piety which oppresses his writings as well as his life.

The fact that a man, with a deep sense of religion, should not have attended any place of public worship, has given great trouble to Milton's biographers. And the principal biographers of this thorough-going nonconformist have been Anglican clergymen; Bishop Newton, Todd, Mitford; Dr. Johnson, more clerical than any cleric, being no exception. Mitford would give Milton a dispensation on the score of his age and infirmities. But the cause lay deeper. A profound apprehension of the spiritual world leads to a disregard of rites. To a mind so disposed externals become, first indifferent, then impedient. Ministration is officious intrusion. I do not find that Milton, though he wrote against paid ministers as hirelings, ever expressly formulated an opinion against ministers as such. But as has already been hinted, there grew up in him, in the last period of his life, a secret sympathy with the mode of thinking which came to characterise the Quaker sect. Not that Milton adopted any of their peculiar fancies. He affirms categorically the permissibility of oaths, of military service, and requires that women should keep silence in the congregation. But in negativing all means of arriving at truth except the letter of scripture interpreted by the inner light, he stood upon the same platform as the followers of George Fox.

Milton's latest utterance on theological topics is found in a tract published by him the year before his death, 1673. The piece is entitled *Of true religion, heresy, schism, toleration;* but its meagre contents do not bear out the comprehensiveness of the title. The only matter really discussed in the pages of the tract is the limit of toleration. The stamp of age is upon the style, which is more careless and incoherent even than usual. He has here dictated his extempore thoughts, without premeditation or revision, so that we have here a record of

Milton's habitual mind. Having watched him gradually emancipating himself from the contracted Calvinistic mould of the Bread-street home, it is disappointing to see that, at sixty-five, his development has proceeded no further than we here find. He is now willing to extend toleration to all sects who make the Scriptures their sole rule of faith. Sects may misunderstand Scripture, but to err is the condition of humanity, and will be pardoned by God, if diligence, prayer, and sincerity have been used. The sects named as to be tolerated are, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians, Socinians, Arminians. They are to be tolerated to the extent of being allowed, on all occasions, to give account of their faith, by arguing, preaching in their several assemblies, writing and printing.

In this pamphlet the principle of toleration is flatly enunciated in opposition to the practice of the Restoration. But the principle is rested not on the statesman's ground of the irrelevancy of religious dispute to good government, but on the theological ground of the venial nature of religious error. And to permissible error there are very narrow limits; limits which exclude Catholics. For Milton will exclude Romanists from toleration, not on the statesman's ground of incivism, but on the theologian's ground of idolatry. All his antagonism in this tract is reserved for the Catholics. There is not a hint of discontent with the prelatry, once intolerable to him. Yet that prelatry was now scourging the nonconformists with scorpions instead of with whips, with its Act of Uniformity, its Conventicle Act, its Five-mile Act, filling the gaols with Milton's own friends and fellow-religionists. Several times, in these thirteen pages, he appeals to the practice or belief of the Church of England, once even calling it "our church."

This tract alone is sufficient refutation of an idle story that Milton died a Roman Catholic. The story is not well vouched, being hearsay three times removed. Milton's younger brother, Sir Christopher, is said to have said so at a dinner entertainment. If he ever did say as much, it must be set down to that peculiar form of credulity which makes perverts think that every one is about to follow their example. In Christopher Milton, "a man of no parts or ability, and a superstitious nature" (Toland), such credulity found a congenial soil.

The tract *Of true religion* was Milton's latest published work. But he was preparing for the press, at the time of his death, a more elaborate theological treatise. Daniel Skinner, a nephew of his old friend Cyriac, was serving as Milton's amanuensis in writing out a fair copy. Death came before a third of the work of correction, 196 pages out of 735, had been completed, of which the whole rough draft consists. The whole remained in Daniel Skinner's hands in 1674. Milton, though in his preface he is aware that his pages contain not a little which will be unpalatable to the reigning opinion in religion, would have dared publication, if he could have passed the censor. But Daniel Skinner, who was a Fellow of Trinity, and had a career before him, was not equally free. What could not appear in London, however, might be printed at Amsterdam. Skinner accordingly put both the theological treatise, and the epistles written by the Latin Secretary, into the hands of Daniel Elzevir. The English government getting intelligence of the proposed publication of the foreign correspondence of the Parliament and the Protector, interfered, and pressure was put upon Skinner, through the Master of Trinity, Isaac Barrow. Skinner hastened to save him-

self from the fate which in 1681 befel Locke, and gave up to the Secretary of State, not only the Latin letters, but the MS. of the theological treatise. Nothing further was known as to the fate of the MS. till 1823, when it was disinterred from one of the presses of the old State Paper Office. The Secretary of State, Sir Joseph Williamson, when he retired from office in 1678, instead of carrying away his correspondence as had been the custom, left it behind him. Thus it was that the *Treatise of Christian doctrine* first saw light, one hundred and fifty years after the author's death.

In a work which had been written as a text-book for the use of learners, there can be little scope for originality. And Milton follows the division of the matter into heads usual in the manuals then current. But it was impossible for Milton to handle the dry bones of a divinity compendium without stirring them into life. And divinity which is made to live, necessarily becomes unorthodox.

The usual method of the school text-books of the seventeenth century was to exhibit dogma in the artificial terminology of the controversies of the sixteenth century. For this procedure Milton substitutes the words of Scripture simply. The traditional terms of the text-books are retained, but they are employed only as heads under which to arrange the words of Scripture. This process, which in other hands would be little better than index making, becomes here pregnant with meaning. The originality which Milton voluntarily resigns, in employing only the words of the Bible, he recovers by his freedom of exposition. He shakes himself loose from the trammels of traditional exposition, and looks at the texts for himself. The truth was

> Left only in those written records pure,
> Though not but by the spirit understood.
> *Paradise Lost*, xii. 510.

Upon the points which interested him most closely, Milton knew that his understanding of the text differed from the standard of Protestant orthodoxy. That God created matter, not out of nothing, but out of Himself, and that death is, in the course of nature, total extinction of being, though not opinions received, were not singular. More startling, to European modes of thinking, is his assertion that polygamy is not, in itself, contrary to morality, though it may be inexpedient. The religious sentiment of his day was offended by his vigorous vindication of the freewill of man against the reigning Calvinism, and his assertion of the inferiority of the Son in opposition to the received Athanasianism. He labours this point of the nature of God with especial care, showing how greatly it occupied his thoughts. He arranges his texts so as to exhibit in Scriptural language the semi-Arian scheme, i. e. a scheme which, admitting the co-essentiality, denies the eternal generation. Through all this manipulation of texts we seem to see, that Milton is not the school logician erecting a consistent fabric of words, but that he is dominated by an imagination peopled with concrete personalities, and labouring to assign their places to the Father and the Son as separate agents in the mundane drama. The *De doctrina Christiana* is the prose counterpart of *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, a caput mortuum of the poems, with every ethereal particle evaporated.

In the royal injunctions of 1614, James I. had ordered students in the universities not to insist too long upon compendiums, but to study the Scriptures, and to bestow their time upon the fathers and councils. In his attempt

to express dogmatic theology in the words of Scripture, Milton was unwittingly obeying this injunction. The other part of the royal direction as to fathers and councils it was not in Milton's plan to carry out. Neither indeed was it in his power, for he had not the necessary learning. M. Scherer says that Milton "laid all antiquity, sacred and profane, under contribution." So far is this from being the case, that while he exhibits, in this treatise, an intimate knowledge of the text of the canonical books, Hebrew and Greek, there is an absence of that average acquaintance with Christian antiquity which formed at that day the professional outfit of the episcopal divine. Milton's references to the fathers are perfunctory and second-hand. The only citation of Chrysostom, for instance, which I have noticed is in these words: "the same is said to be the opinion of Chrysostom, Luther, and other moderns." He did not esteem the judgment of the fathers sufficiently, to deem them worth studying. In the interpretation of texts, as in other matters of opinion, Milton withdrew within the fortress of his absolute personality.

I have now to relate the external history of the composition of *Paradise Lost*. When Milton had to skulk for a time in 1660, he was already in steady work upon the poem. Though a few lines of it were composed as early as 1642, it was not till 1658 that he took up the task of composition continuously. If we may trust our only authority (Aubrey-Phillips), he had finished it in 1663, about the time of his marriage. In polishing, re-writing, and writing out fair, much might remain to be done, after the poem was, in a way, finished. It is in 1665, that we first make acquaintance with *Paradise Lost* in a complete state. This was the year

of the plague, known in our annals as the Great Plague, to distinguish its desolating ravages from former slighter visitations of the epidemic. Every one who could fled from the city of destruction. Milton applied to his young friend Ellwood to find him a shelter. Ellwood, who was then living as tutor in the house of the Penningtons, took a cottage for Milton in their neighbourhood, at Chalfont St. Giles, in the county of Bucks. Not only the Penningtons, but General Fleetwood had also his residence near this village, and a report is mentioned by Howitt that it was Fleetwood who provided the ex-secretary with a refuge. The society of neither of these friends was available for Milton. For Fleetwood was a sentenced regicide, and in July, Pennington and Ellwood were hurried off to Aylesbury gaol by an indefatigable justice of the peace, who was desirous of giving evidence of his zeal for the king's government. That the Chalfont cottage "was not pleasantly situated," must have been indifferent to the blind old man, as much so as that the immediate neighbourhood, with its heaths and wooded uplands, reproduced the scenery he had loved when he wrote *L'Allegro*.

As soon as Ellwood was relieved from imprisonment, he returned to Chalfont. Then it was that Milton put into his hands the completed *Paradise Lost*, "bidding me take it home with me, and read it at my leisure, and when I had so done, return it to him with my judgment thereupon." On returning it, besides giving the author the benefit of his judgment, a judgment not preserved, and not indispensable—the Quaker made his famous speech, "Thou hast said much here of *Paradise Lost*, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?" Milton afterwards told Ellwood that to this casual question was due his writing *Paradise Regained*. We are not, however, to take this

complaisant speech quite literally, for it is highly probable that the later poem was included in the original conception, if not in the scheme of the first epic. But we do get from Ellwood's reminiscence a date for the beginning of *Paradise Regained*, which must have been at Chalfont in the autumn of 1665.

When the plague was abated, and the city had become safely habitable, Milton returned to Artillery Row. He had not been long back when London was devastated by a fresh calamity, only less terrible than the plague, because it destroyed the home, and not the life. The Great Fire succeeded the Great Plague. 13,000 houses, two-thirds of the city, were reduced to ashes, and the whole current of life and business entirely suspended. Through these two overwhelming disasters, Milton must have been supporting his solitary spirit by writing *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, and giving the final touches to *Paradise Lost*. He was now so wholly unmoved by his environment, that we look in vain in the poems for any traces of this season of suffering and disaster. The past and his own meditations were now all in all to him; the horrors of the present were as nothing to a man who had outlived his hopes. Plague and fire, what were they, after the ruin of the noblest of causes? The stoical compression of *Paradise Regained* is in perfect keeping with the fact that it was in the middle of the ruins of London that Milton placed his finished poem in the hands of the licenser.

For licenser there was now, the Archbishop of Canterbury to wit, for religious literature. Of course the Primate read by deputy, usually one of his chaplains. The reader into whose hands *Paradise Lost* came, though an Oxford man, and a cleric on his preferment, who had written his pamphlet against the dissenters, happened

to be one whose antecedents, as Fellow of All Souls, and Proctor (in 1663), ensured his taking a less pedantic and bigoted view of his duties. Still, though Dryden's dirty plays would have encountered no objection before such a tribunal, the same facilities were not likely to be accorded to anything which bore the name of John Milton, ex-secretary to Oliver, and himself an austere republican. Tomkyns—that was the young chaplain's name—did stumble at a phrase in Book i. 598,

> With fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs.

There had been in England, and were to be again, times when men had hanged for less than this. Tomkyns, who was sailing on the smooth sea of preferment with a fair wind, did not wish to get into trouble, but at last he let the book pass. Perhaps he thought it was only religious verse written for the sectaries, which would never be heard of at court, or among the wits, and that therefore it was of little consequence what it contained.

A publisher was found, notwithstanding that Paul's, or as it now was again, St. Paul's-Churchyard had ceased to exist, in Aldersgate, which lay outside the circuit of the conflagration. The agreement, still preserved in the national museum, between the author, "John Milton, gent. of the one parte, and Samuel Symons, printer, of the other parte," is among the curiosities of our literary history. The curiosity consists not so much in the illustrious name appended (not in autograph) to the deed, as in the contrast between the present fame of the book, and the waste-paper price at which the copyright is being valued. The author received 5*l.* down, was to receive a second 5*l.* when the first edition should be sold, a third 5*l.* when the second, and a fourth 5*l.* when the third

edition should be gone. Milton lived to receive the second 5*l.*, and no more, 10*l.* in all, for *Paradise Lost*. I cannot bring myself to join in the lamentations of the biographers over this bargain. Surely it is better so; better to know that the noblest monument of English letters had no money value, than to think of it as having been paid for at a pound the line.

The agreement with Symons is dated 27 April, 1667, the entry in the register of Stationers' Hall is 20th August. It was therefore in the autumn of 1667 that *Paradise Lost* was in the hands of the public. We have no data for the time occupied in the composition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. We have seen that the former poem was begun at Chalfont in 1665, and it may be conjecturally stated that *Samson* was finished before September, 1667. At any rate, both the poems were published together in the autumn of 1670.

Milton had four years more of life granted him after this publication. But he wrote no more poetry. It was as if he had exhausted his strength in a last effort, in the Promethean agony of Samson, and knew that his hour of inspiration was passed away. But, like all men who have once tasted the joys and pangs of composition, he could not now do without its excitement. The occupation, and the indispensable solace of the last ten sad years, had been his poems. He would not write more verse, when the œstrus was not on him, but he must write. He took up all the dropped threads of past years, ambitious plans formed in the fulness of vigour, and laid aside, but not abandoned. He was the very opposite of Shelley, who could never look at a piece of his own composition a second time, but when he had thrown it off at a heat, rushed into something else. Milton's adhesiveness was such that he could never give

up a design once entered upon. In these four years, as if conscious that his time was now nearly out, he laboured to complete five such early undertakings.

(1.) Of his *Compendium of Theology* I have already spoken. He was overtaken by death while preparing this for the press.

(2.) His *History of Britain* must have cost him much labour, bestowed upon comparison of the conflicting authorities. It is the record of the studies he had made for his abandoned epic poem, and is evidence how much the subject occupied his mind.

The *History of Britain*, 1670, had been preceded by (3) a Latin grammar, in 1669, and was followed by (4) a Logic on the method of Ramus, 1672.

(5.) In 1673 he brought out a new edition of his early volume of *Poems*. In this volume he printed for the first time the sonnets, and other pieces, which had been written in the interval of twenty-seven years since the date of his first edition. Not, indeed, all the sonnets which we now have. Four, in which Fairfax, Vane, Cromwell, and the Commonwealth are spoken of as Milton would speak of them, were necessarily kept back, and not put into print till 1694, by Phillips, at the end of his life of his uncle.

In proportion to the trouble which Milton's words cost him, was his care in preserving them. His few Latin letters to his foreign friends are remarkably barren either of fact or sentiment. But Milton liked them well enough to have kept copies of them, and now allowed a publisher, Brabazon Aylmer, to issue them in print, adding to them, with a view to make out a volume, his college exercises, which he had also preserved.

Among the papers which he left at his death, were the beginnings of two undertakings, either of them of over-

whelming magnitude, which he did not live to complete. We have seen that he taught his pupils geography out of *Davity, Description de l'Univers*. He was not satisfied with this, or with any existing compendium. They were all dry; exact enough with their latitudes and longitudes, but omitted such uninteresting stuff as manners, government, religion, &c. Milton would essay a better system. All he had ever executed was Russia, taking the pains to turn over and extract for his purpose all the best travels in that country. This is the fragment which figures in his Works as a *Brief History of Moscovia*.

The hackneyed metaphor of Pegasus harnessed to a luggage trolley, will recur to us when we think of the author of *L'Allegro*, setting himself to compile a Latin lexicon. If there is any literary drudgery more mechanical than another, it is generally supposed to be that of making a dictionary. Nor had he taken to this industry as a resource in age, when the genial flow of invention had dried up, and original composition had ceased to be in his power. The three folio volumes of MS. which Milton left were the work of his youth; it was a work which the loss of eyesight of necessity put an end to. It is not Milton only, but all students who read with an alert mind, reading to grow, and not to remember, who have felt the want of an occupation which shall fill those hours when mental vigilance is impossible, and vacuity unendurable. Index-making or cataloguing has been the resource of many in such hours. But it was not, I think, as a mere shifting of mental posture that Milton undertook to rewrite Robert Stephens; it was as part of his language training. Only by diligent practice and incessant exercise of attention and care, could Milton have educated his susceptibility to the specific power of words, to the nicety which he attained

beyond any other of our poets. Part of this education is recorded in the seemingly withered leaves of his Latin Thesaurus, though the larger part must have been achieved, not by a reflective and critical collection of examples, but by a vital and impassioned reading.

Milton's complaint was what the profession of that day called gout. "He would be very cheerful even in his gout fits, and sing," says Aubrey. This gout returned again and again, and by these repeated attacks wore out his resisting power. He died of the "gout struck in" on Sunday, 8th November, 1674, and was buried, near his father, in the chancel of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. The funeral was attended, Toland says, "by all his learned and great friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the vulgar." The disgusting profanation of the leaden coffin, and dispersion of the poet's bones by the parochial authorities, during the repair of the church in August, 1790, has been denied, but it is to be feared the fact is too true.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARADISE LOST—PARADISE REGAINED—SAMSON AGONISTES

"MANY men of forty," it has been said, "are dead poets;" and it might seem that Milton, Latin secretary, and party pamphleteer, had died to poetry about the fatal age. In 1645, when he made a gathering of his early pieces for the volume published by Humphry Moseley, he wanted three years of forty. That volume contained, besides other things, *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*; then, when produced, as they remain to this day, the finest flower of English poesy. But, though thus like a wary husbandman, garnering his sheaves in presence of the threatening storm, Milton had no intention of bidding farewell to poetry. On the contrary, he regarded this volume only as first-fruits, an earnest of greater things to come.

The ruling idea of Milton's life, and the key to his mental history, is his resolve to produce a great poem. Not that the aspiration in itself is singular, for it is probably shared by every young poet in his turn. As every clever schoolboy is destined by himself or his friends to become Lord Chancellor, and every private in the French army carries in his haversack the bâton of a marshal, so it is a necessary ingredient of the dream on Parnassus,

that it should embody itself in a form of surpassing brilliance. What distinguishes Milton from the crowd of young ambition, "audax juventa," is the constancy of resolve. He not only nourished through manhood the dream of youth, keeping under the importunate instincts which carry off most ambitions in middle life into the pursuit of place, profit, honour—the thorns which spring up and smother the wheat—but carried out his dream in its integrity in old age. He formed himself for this achievement, and for no other. Study at home, travel abroad, the arena of political controversy, the public service, the practice of the domestic virtues, were so many parts of the schooling which was to make a poet.

The reader who has traced with me thus far the course of Milton's mental development will perhaps be ready to believe, that this idea had taken entire possession of his mind from a very early age. The earliest written record of it is of date 1632, in Sonnet II. This was written as early as the poet's twenty-third year; and in these lines the resolve is uttered, not as then just conceived, but as one long brooded upon, and its non-fulfilment matter of self-reproach.

If this sonnet stood alone, its relevance to a poetical, or even a literary performance, might be doubtful. But at the time of its composition it is enclosed in a letter to an unnamed friend, who seems to have been expressing his surprise that the Cambridge B.A. was not settling himself, now that his education was complete, to a profession. Milton's apologetic letter is extant, and was printed by Birch in 1738. It intimates that Milton did not consider his education, for the purposes he had in view, as anything like complete. It is not "the endless delight of speculation," but "a religious advisement how best to undergo;

not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit." He repudiates the love of learning for its own sake; knowledge is not an end, it is only equipment for performance. There is here no specific engagement as to the nature of the performance. But what it is to be, is suggested by the enclosure of the "Petrarchian stanza" (i. e. the sonnet). This notion that his life was like Samuel's, a dedicated life, dedicated to a service which required a long probation, recurs again more than once in his writings. It is emphatically repeated, in 1641, in a passage of the pamphlet No. 4 :—

None hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit none shall,—that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and full license will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs. Till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation, from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them.

In 1638, at the age of nine and twenty, Milton has already determined that this lifework shall be a poem, an epic poem, and that its subject shall probably be the Arthurian legend.

Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictæ sociali fœdere mensæ
Magnanimos heroas, et, o modo spiritus adsit!
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub marte phalangas.

May I find such a friend . . . . when, if ever, I shall revive in song our native princes, and among them Arthur moving to the fray even in the nether world, and when I shall, if only inspiration be mine, break the Saxon bands before our Britons' prowess.

The same announcement is reproduced in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, 1639, and, in Pamphlet No. 4, in the often-quoted words :—

Perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty, or thereabout, met with acceptance, . . . I began to assent to them (the Italians) and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let it die.

Between the publication of the collected *Poems* in 1645, and the appearance of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, a period of twenty-two years, Milton gave no public sign of redeeming this pledge. He seemed to his cotemporaries to have renounced the follies of his youth, the gewgaws of verse, and to have sobered down into the useful citizen. "Le bon poëte," thought Malherbe, "n'est pas plus utile à l'état qu'un bon joueur de quilles." Milton had postponed his poem, in 1641, till "the land had once enfranchished herself from this impertinent yoke of prelatry, under whose inquisitorious and tyrannical

duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish." Prelatry was swept away, and he asked for further remand on account of the war. Peace was concluded, the country was settled under the strong government of a Protector, and Milton's great work did not appear. It was not even preparing. He was writing not poetry but prose, and that most ephemeral and valueless kind of prose, pamphlets, extempore articles on the topics of the day. He poured out reams of them, in simple unconsciousness that they had no influence whatever on the current of events.

Nor was it that, during all these years, Milton was meditating in secret what he could not bring forward in public; that he was only holding back from publishing, because there was no public ready to listen to his song. In these years Milton was neither writing nor thinking poetry. Of the twenty-four sonnets indeed—twenty-four, reckoning the twenty-lined piece, "The forcers of conscience," as a sonnet—eleven belong to this period. But they do not form a continuous series, such as do Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, nor do they evince a sustained mood of poetical meditation. On the contrary, their very force and beauty consist in their being the momentary and spontaneous explosion of an emotion welling up from the depths of the soul, and forcing itself into metrical expression, as it were, in spite of the writer. While the first eight sonnets, written before 1645, are sonnets of reminiscence and intention, like those of the Italians, or the ordinary English sonnet, the eleven sonnets of Milton's silent period, from 1645 to 1658, are records of present feeling kindled by actual facts. In their naked, unadorned simplicity of language, they may easily seem, to a reader fresh from Petrarch, to be homely and prosaic. Place them in relation to the

circumstance on which each piece turns, and we begin to feel the superiority for poetic effect of real emotion over emotion meditated and revived. History has in it that which can touch us more abidingly than any fiction. It is this actuality which distinguishes the sonnets of Milton from any other sonnets. Of this difference Wordsworth was conscious when he struck out the phrase, "In his hand the *thing became* a trumpet." Macaulay compared the sonnets in their majestic severity to the collects. They remind us of a Hebrew psalm, with its undisguised outrush of rage, revenge, exultation, or despair, where nothing is due to art or artifice, and whose poetry is the expression of the heart, and not a branch of literature. It is in the sonnets we most realise the force of Wordsworth's image—

> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

We are not then to look in the sonnets for latent traces of the suspended poetic creation. They come from the other side of Milton's nature, the political, not the artistic. They are akin to the prose pamphlets, not to *Paradise Lost*. Just when the sonnets end, the composition of the epic was taken in hand. The last of the sonnets (23 in the ordinary numeration) was written in 1658, and it is to the same year that our authority, Aubrey-Phillips, refers his beginning to occupy himself with *Paradise Lost*. He had by this time settled the two points about which he had been long in doubt, the subject, and the form. Long before bringing himself to the point of composition, he had decided upon the Fall of man as subject, and upon the narrative, or epic, form, in preference to the dramatic. It is even possible that a few isolated passages of the poem, as it now stands, may have been written before. Of one

such passage we know that it was written fifteen or sixteen years before 1658, and while he was still contemplating a drama. The lines are Satan's speech, *P. L.* iv. 32, beginning,—

O, thou that with surpassing glory crowned.

These lines, Phillips says, his uncle recited to him, as forming the opening of his tragedy. They are modelled, as the classical reader will perceive, upon Euripides. Possibly they were not intended for the very first lines, since if Milton intended to follow the practice of his model, the lofty lyrical tone of this address should have been introduced by a prosaic matter-of-fact setting forth of the situation, as in the Euripidean prologue. There are other passages in the poem which have the air of being insititious in the place where they stand. The lines in Book iv, now in question, may reasonably be referred to 1640-42, the date of those leaves in the Trinity College MS., in which Milton has written down, with his own hand, various sketches of tragedies, which might possibly be adopted as his final choice.

A passage in *The Reason of Church Government*, written at the same period, 1641, gives us the the fullest account of his hesitation. It was a hesitation caused, partly by the wealth of matter which his reading suggested to him, partly by the consciousness that he ought not to begin in haste while each year was ripening his powers. Every one who has undertaken a work of any length has made the experience, that the faculty of composition will not work with ease, until the reason is satisfied that the subject chosen is a congenial one. Gibbon has told us himself of the many periods of history upon which he tried his pen, even after the memorable 15 October, 1764, when

he "sate musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter." We know how many sketches of possible tragedies Racine would make before he could adopt one as the appropriate theme, on which he could work with that thorough enjoyment of the labour, which is necessary to give life and verve to any creation, whether of the poet or the orator.

The leaves of the Trinity College MS., which are contemporary with his confidence to the readers of his tract *Of Church Government*, exhibit a list of nearly one hundred subjects, which had occurred to him from time to time as practicable subjects. From the mode of entry we see that, already in 1641, a scriptural was likely to have the preference over a profane subject, and that among scriptural subjects *Paradise Lost* (the familiar title appears in this early note), stands out prominently above the rest. The historical subjects are all taken from native history, none are foreign, and all are from the time before the Roman conquest. The scriptural subjects are partly from the Old, partly from the New, Testament. Some of these subjects are named and nothing more, while others are slightly sketched out. Among these latter are *Baptistes*, on the death of John the Baptist, and *Christus Patiens*, apparently to be confined to the agony in the garden. Of *Paradise Lost* there are four drafts in greater detail than any of the others. These drafts of the plot or action, though none of them that which was finally adopted, are sufficiently near to the action of the poem as it stands, to reveal to us the fact that the author's imaginative conception of what he intended to produce was generated, cast, and moulded, at a comparatively early age. The commonly received notion, therefore, with which authors, as they age, are

wont to comfort themselves, that one of the greatest feats of original invention achieved by man, was begun after fifty, must be thus far modified. *Paradise Lost* was *composed* after fifty, but was *conceived* at thirty-two. Hence the high degree of perfection realised in the total result. For there were combined to produce it the opposite virtues of two distinct periods of mental development; the daring imagination and fresh emotional play of early manhood, with the exercised judgment and chastened taste of ripened years. We have regarded the twenty-five years of Milton's life between 1641 and the commencement of *Paradise Lost*, as time ill laid out upon inferior work which any one could do, and which was not worth doing by any one. Yet it may be made a question if in any other mode than by adjournment of his early design, Milton could have attained to that union of original strength with severe restraint, which distinguishes from all other poetry, except that of Virgil, the three great poems of his old age. If the fatigue of age is sometimes felt in *Paradise Regained*, we feel in *Paradise Lost* only (in the words of Chateaubriand), "la maturité de l'âge à travers les passions des légères années; une charme extraordinaire de vieillesse et de jeunesse."

A still further inference is warranted by the Trinity College jottings of 1641. Not the critics merely, but readers ready to sympathise, have been sometimes inclined to wish that Milton had devoted his power to a more human subject, in which the poet's invention could have had freer play, and for which his reader's interest could have been more ready. And it has been thought that the choice of a Biblical subject indicates the narrowing effect of age, adversity, and blindness combined. We now know that the Fall was the theme, if not determined on, at

least predominant in Milton's thoughts, at the age of thirty-two. His ripened judgment only approved a selection made in earlier years, and in days full of hope. That in selecting a scriptural subject he was not in fact exercising any choice, but was determined by his circumstances, is only what must be said of all choosing. With all his originality, Milton was still a man of his age. A Puritan poet, in a Puritan environment, could not have done otherwise. But even had choice been in his power, it is doubtful if he would have had the same success with a subject taken from history.

First, looking at his public. He was to write in English. This, which had at one time been matter of doubt, had at an early stage come to be his decision. Nor had the choice of English been made for the sake of popularity, which he despised. He did not desire to write for the many, but for the few. But he was enthusiastically patriotic. He had entire contempt for the shouts of the mob, but the English nation, as embodied in the persons of the wise and good, he honoured and reverenced with all the depth of his nature. It was for the sake of his nation that he was to devote his life to a work, which was to ennoble her tongue among the languages of Europe.

He was then to write in English, for the English, not popularly, but nationally. This resolution at once limited his subject. He who aspires to be the poet of a nation is bound to adopt a hero who is already dear to that people, to choose a subject and characters which are already familiar to them. This is no rule of literary art arbitrarily enacted by the critics, it is a dictate of reason, and has been the practice of all the great national poets. The more obvious examples will occur to every reader. But it may be observed that even the Greek tragedians,

who addressed a more limited audience than the epic poets, took their plots from the best known legends touching the fortunes of the royal houses of the Hellenic race. Now to the English reader of the seventeenth century—and the same holds good to this day—there were only two cycles of persons and events sufficiently known beforehand to admit of being assumed by a poet. He must go either to the Bible, or to the annals of England. Thus far Milton's choice of subject was limited by the consideration of the public for whom he wrote.

Secondly, he was still farther restricted by a condition which the nature of his own intelligence imposed upon himself. It was necessary for Milton that the events and personages, which were to arouse and detain his interests, should be real events and personages. The mere play of fancy with the pretty aspects of things could not satisfy him; he wanted to feel beneath him a substantial world of reality. He had not the dramatist's imagination which can body forth fictitious characters with such life-like reality that it can, and does itself, believe in their existence. Macaulay has truly said that Milton's genius is lyrical, not dramatic. His lyre will only echo real emotion, and his imagination is only stirred by real circumstances. In his youth he had been within the fascination of the romances of chivalry, as well in their original form, as in the reproductions of Ariosto and Spenser. While under this influence he had thought of seeking his subject among the heroes of these lays of old minstrelsy. And as one of his principles was that his hero must be a national hero, it was of course upon the Arthurian cycle that his aspiration fixed. When he did so, he no doubt believed at least the historical existence of Arthur. As soon, however, as he came to understand the fabulous basis of the Arthurian legend,

it became unfitted for his use. In the Trinity College MS. of 1641, Arthur has already disappeared from the list of possible subjects, a list which contains thirty-eight suggestions of names from British or Saxon history, such as Vortigern, Edward the Confessor, Harold, Macbeth, &c. While he demanded the basis of reality for his personages, he at the same time, with a true instinct, rejected all that fell within the period of well-ascertained history. He made the Conquest the lower limit of his choice. In this negative decision against historical romance we recognise Milton's judgment, and his correct estimate of his own powers. Those who have been thought to succeed best in engrafting fiction upon history, Shakspeare or Walter Scott, have been eminently human poets, and have achieved their measure of success by investing some well-known name with the attributes of ordinary humanity such as we all know it. This was precisely what Milton could not have done. He had none of that sympathy with which Shakspeare embraced all natural and common affections of his brother men. Milton, burning as he did with a consuming fire of passion, and yearning for rapt communion with select souls, had withal an aloofness from ordinary men and women, and a proud disdain of commonplace joy and sorrow, which has led hasty biographers and critics to represent him as hard, austere, an iron man of iron mould. This want of interest in common life disqualified him for the task of revivifying historic scenes.

Milton's mental constitution, then, demanded in the material upon which it was to work, a combination of qualities such as very few subjects could offer. The events and personages must be real and substantial, for he could not occupy himself seriously with airy nothings and

creatures of pure fancy. Yet they must not be such events and personages as history had pourtrayed to us with well-known characters, and all their virtues, faults, foibles, and peculiarities. And, lastly, it was requisite that they should be the common property and the familiar interest of a wide circle of English readers.

These being the conditions required in the subject, it is obvious that no choice was left to the poet in the England of the seventeenth century but a biblical subject. And among the many picturesque episodes which the Hebrew Scriptures present, the narrative of the Fall stands out with a character of all-embracing comprehensiveness which belongs to no other single event in the Jewish annals. The first section of the book of Genesis clothes in a dramatic form the dogmatic idea from which was developed in the course of ages the whole scheme of Judaico-Christian anthropology. In this world-drama, Heaven above and Hell beneath, the powers of light and those of darkness, are both brought upon the scene in conflict with each other, over the fate of the inhabitants of our globe, a minute ball of matter suspended between two infinities. This gigantic and unmanageable material is so completely mastered by the poet's imagination, that we are made to feel at one and the same time the petty dimensions of our earth in comparison with primordial space and almighty power, and the profound import to us of the issue depending on the conflict. Other poets, of inferior powers, have from time to time attempted, with different degrees of success, some of the minor Scriptural histories ; Bodmer, the Noachian Deluge; Solomon Gessner, the Death of Abel, &c. And Milton himself, after he had spent his full strength upon his greater theme, recurred in *Samson Agonistes* to one such episode, which he had deliberately

set aside before, as not giving verge enough for the sweep of his soaring conception.

These considerations duly weighed, it will be found that the subject of the Fall of Man was not so much Milton's choice as his necessity. Among all the traditions of the peoples of the earth, there is not extant another story which could have been adequate to his demands. Biographers may have been somewhat misled by his speaking of himself as "long choosing and beginning late." He did not begin till 1658, when he was already fifty, and it has been somewhat hastily inferred that he did not choose till the date at which he began. But, as we have seen, he had already chosen at least as early as 1642, when the plan of a drama on the subject, and under the title, of *Paradise Lost* was fully developed. In the interval between 1642 and 1658, he changed the form from a drama to an epic, but his choice remained unaltered. And as the address to the sun (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 32) was composed at the earlier of these dates, it appears that he had already formulated even the rhythm and cadence of the poem that was to be. Like Wordsworth's "Warrior"—

> He wrought
> Upon the plan that pleas'd his boyish thought.

I have said that this subject of the Fall was Milton's necessity, being the only subject which his mind, "in the spacious circuits of her musing," found large enough. But as it was no abrupt or arbitrary choice, so it was not forced upon him from without, by suggestion of friends, or command of a patron. We must again remind ourselves that Milton had a Calvinistic bringing up. And Calvinism in pious Puritan souls of that fervent age was not the attenuated creed of the eighteenth century, the Calvinism which went not beyond personal gratification of

safety for oneself, and for the rest damnation. When Milton was being reared, Calvinism was not old and effete, a mere doctrine. It was a living system of thought, and one which carried the mind upwards towards the Eternal will, rather than downwards towards my personal security. Keble has said of the old Catholic views, founded on sacramental symbolism, that they are more poetical than any other religious conception. But it must be acknowledged that a predestinarian scheme, leading the cogitation upward to dwell upon "the heavenly things before the foundation of the world," opens a vista of contemplation and poetical framework, with which none other in the whole cycle of human thought can compare. Not election and reprobation as set out in the petty chicanery of Calvin's *Institutes*, but the prescience of absolute wisdom revolving all the possibilities of time, space, and matter. Poetry has been defined as "the suggestion by the image of noble grounds for noble emotions," and, in this respect, none of the world-epics—there are at most five or six such in existence—can compete with *Paradise Lost*. The melancholy pathos of Lucretius indeed pierces the heart with a two-edged sword more keen than Milton's, but the compass of Lucretius' horizon is much less, being limited to this earth and its inhabitants. The horizon of *Paradise Lost* is not narrower than all space, its chronology not shorter than eternity; the globe of our earth becomes a mere spot in the physical universe, and that universe itself a drop suspended in the infinite empyrean. His aspiration had thus reached "one of the highest arcs that human contemplation circling upwards can make from the glassy sea whereon she stands" (*Doctr. and Disc.*). Like his contemporary Pascal, his mind had beaten her wings against the prison walls of human thought.

The vastness of the scheme of *Paradise Lost* may

become more apparent to us if we remark that, within its embrace, there seems to be equal place for both the systems of physical astronomy which were current in the seventeenth century. In England, about the time *Paradise Lost* was being written, the Copernican theory, which placed the sun in the centre of our system, was already the established belief of the few well-informed. The old Ptolemaic or Alphonsine system, which explained the phenomena on the hypothesis of nine (or ten) transparent hollow spheres wheeling round the stationary earth, was still the received astronomy of ordinary people. These two beliefs, the one based on science, though still wanting the calculation which Newton was to supply to make it demonstrative, the other supported by the tradition of ages, were, at the time we speak of, in presence of each other in the public mind. They are in presence of each other also in Milton's epic. And the systems confront each other in the poem, in much the same relative position which they occupied in the mind of the public. The ordinary, habitual mode of speaking of celestial phenomena is Ptolemaic (see *Paradise Lost*, vii. 339; iii. 481). The conscious, or doctrinal, exposition of the same phenomena is Copernican (see *Paradise Lost*, viii. 122). Sharp as is the contrast between the two systems, the one being the direct contradictory of the other, they are lodged together, not harmonised, within the vast circuit of the poet's imagination. The precise mechanism of an object so little as is our world in comparison with the immense totality may be justly disregarded. "De minimis non curat poeta." In the universe of being the difference between a heliocentric and a geocentric theory of our solar system is of as small moment, as the reconcilement of fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute is in the

realm of absolute intelligence. The one is the frivolous pastime of devils; the other the Great Architect

> Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
> His laughter at their quaint opinions wide.

As one, and the principal, inconsistency in Milton's presentment of his matter has now been mentioned, a general remark may be made upon the conceptual incongruities in *Paradise Lost*. The poem abounds in such, and the critics, from Addison downwards, have busied themselves in finding out more and more of them. Milton's geography of the world is as obscure and untenable as that of Herodotus. The notes of time cannot stand together. To give an example: Eve says (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 449)—

> That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awak'd.

But in the chronology of the poem, Adam himself, whose creation preceded that of Eve, was but three days old at the time this reminiscence is repeated to him. The mode in which the Son of God is spoken of is not either consistent Athanasianism or consistent Arianism. Above all there is an incessant confusion of material and immaterial in the acts ascribed to the angels. Dr. Johnson, who wished for consistency, would have had it preserved "by keeping immateriality out of sight." And a general arraignment has been laid against Milton of a vagueness and looseness of imagery, which contrasts unfavourably with the vivid and precise detail of other poets, of Homer or of Dante, for example.

Now first, it must be said that Milton is not one of the poets of inaccurate imagination. He could never, like

Scott, have let the precise picture of the swan on "still Saint Mary's lake" slip into the namby-pamby "sweet Saint Mary's lake." When he intends a picture, he is unmistakably distinct; his outline is firm and hard. But he is not often intending pictures. He is not, like Dante, always seeing—he is mostly thinking in a dream, or as Coleridge best expressed it, he is not a picturesque, but a musical poet. The pictures in *Paradise Lost* are like the paintings on the walls of some noble hall—only part of the total magnificence. He did not aim at that finish of minute parts in which each bit fits into every other. For it was only by such disregard of minutiæ that the theme could be handled at all. The impression of vastness, the sense that everything, as Bishop Butler says, "runs up into infinity," would have been impaired if he had drawn attention to the details of his figures. Had he had upon his canvas only a single human incident, with ordinary human agents, he would have known, as well as other far inferior artists, how to secure perfection of illusion by exactness of detail. But he had undertaken to present, not the world of human experience, but a supernatural world, peopled by supernatural beings, God and his Son, angels and archangels, devils; a world in which Sin and Death may be personified without palpable absurdity. Even his one human pair are exceptional beings, from whom we are prepared not to demand conformity to the laws of life which now prevail in our world. Had he presented all these spiritual personages in definite form to the eye, the result would have been degradation. We should have had the ridiculous instead of the sublime, as in the scene of the *Iliad*, where Diomede wounds Aphrodite in the hand, and sends her crying home to her father. Once or twice Milton has ventured too

near the limit of material adaptation, trying to explain *how* angelic natures subsist, as in the passage (*Paradise Lost*, v. 405) where Raphael tells Adam that angels eat and digest food like man. Taste here receives a shock, because the incongruity, which before was latent, is forced upon our attention. We are threatened with being transported out of the conventional world of Heaven, Hell, Chaos, and Paradise, to which we had well adapted ourselves, into the real world in which we know that such beings could not breathe and move.

For the world of *Paradise Lost* is an ideal, conventional world, quite as much as the world of the *Arabian Nights*, or the world of the chivalrous romance, or that of the pastoral novel. Not only dramatic, but all, poetry is founded on illusion. We must, though it be but for the moment, suppose it true. We must be transported out of the actual world into that world in which the given scene is laid. It is chiefly the business of the poet to effect this transportation, but the reader (or hearer) must aid. "Willst du Dichter ganz verstehen, musst in Dichter's Lande gehen." If the reader's imagination is not active enough to assist the poet, he must at least not resist him. When we are once inside the poet's heaven, our critical faculty may justly require that what takes place there shall be consistent with itself, with the laws of that fantastic world. But we may not begin by objecting that it is impossible that such a world should exist. If, in any age, the power of imagination is enfeebled, the reader becomes more unable to make this effort; he ceases to co-operate with the poet. Much of the criticism on *Paradise Lost* which we meet with resolves itself into a refusal on the part of the critic, to make that initial abondonment to the conditions which the poet demands; a determina-

tion to insist that his heaven, peopled with deities, dominations, principalities, and powers, shall have the same material laws which govern our planetary system. It is not, as we often hear it said, that the critical faculty is unduly developed in the nineteenth century. It is that the imaginative faculty fails us; and when that is the case, criticism is powerless—it has no fundamental assumption upon which its judgments can proceed.

It is the triumph of Milton's skill to have made his ideal world actual, if not to every English mind's eye, yet to a larger number of minds than have ever been reached by any other poetry in our language. Popular (in the common use of the word) Milton has not been, and cannot be. But the world he created has taken possession of the public mind. Huxley complains that the false cosmogony, which will not yield to the conclusions of scientific research, is derived from the seventh book of *Paradise Lost*, rather than from Genesis. This success Milton owes partly to his selection of his subject, partly to his skill in handling it. In his handling, he presents his spiritual existences with just so much relief as to endow them with life and personality, and not with that visual distinctness which would at once reveal their spectral immateriality, and so give a shock to the illusion. We might almost say of his personages that they are shapes, "if shape it might be called, that shape had none." By his art of suggestion by association, he does all he can to aid us to realise his agents, and at the moment when distinctness would disturb, he withdraws the object into a mist, and so disguises the incongruities which he could not avoid. The tact that avoids difficulties inherent in the nature of things, is an art which gets the least appreciation either in life or in litera-

ture. But if we would have some measure of the skill which in *Paradise Lost* has made impossible beings possible to the imagination, we may find it in contrasting them with the incarnated abstraction and spirit voices, which we encounter at every turn in Shelley, creatures who leave behind them no more distinct impression than that we have been in a dream peopled with ghosts. Shelley, too,

> Voyag'd th' unreal, vast, unbounded deep
> Of horrible confusion.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, x. 470.

and left it the chaos which he found it. Milton has elicited from similar elements a conception so life-like that his poetical version has inseparably grafted itself upon, if it has not taken the place of, the historical narrative of the original creation.

So much Milton has effected by his skilful treatment. But the illusion was greatly facilitated by his choice of subject. He had not to create his supernatural personages, they were already there. The Father, and the Son, the Angels, Satan, Baal and Moloch, Adam and Eve, were in full possession of the popular imagination, and more familiar to it than any other set of known names. Nor was the belief accorded to them a half belief, a bare admission of their possible existence, such as prevails at other times or in some countries. In the England of Milton, the angels and devils of the Jewish Scriptures were more real beings, and better vouched, than any historical personages could be. The old chronicles were full of lies, but this was Bible truth. There might very likely have been a Henry VIII., and he might have been such as he is described, but at any rate he was dead and gone, while

Satan still lived and walked the earth, the identical Satan who had deceived Eve.

Nor was it only to the poetic public that his personages were real, true, and living beings. The poet himself believed as entirely in their existence as did his readers. I insist upon this point, because one of the first of living critics has declared of *Paradise Lost* that it is a poem in which every artifice of invention is consciously employed, not a single fact being, for an instant, conceived as tenable by any living faith. (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 138). On the contrary, we shall not rightly apprehend either the poetry or the character of the poet until we feel that throughout *Paradise Lost*, as in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, Milton felt himself to be standing on the sure ground of fact and reality. It was not in Milton's nature to be a showman, parading before an audience a phantasmagoria of spirits, which he himself knew to be puppets tricked up for the entertainment of an idle hour. We are told by Lockhart, that the old man who told the story of Gilpin Horner to Lady Dalkeith *bonâ fide* believed the existence of the elf. Lady Dalkeith repeated the tale to Walter Scott, who worked it up with consummate skill into the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. This is a case of a really believed legend of diablerie becoming the source of a literary fiction. Scott neither believed in the reality of the goblin page himself, nor expected his readers to believe it. He could not rise beyond the poetry of amusement, and no poetry with only this motive can ever be more than literary art.

Other than this was Milton's conception of his own function. Of the fashionable verse, such as was written in the Caroline age, or in any age, he disapproved, not only because it was imperfect art, but because it was untrue

utterance. Poems that were raised "from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite," were in his eyes treachery to the poet's high vocation.

Poetical powers "are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed . . . in every nation, and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbation of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship."

So he had written in 1642, and this lofty faith in his calling supported him twenty years later, in the arduous labour of his attempt to realise his own ideal. In setting himself down to compose *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, he regarded himself not as an author, but as a medium, the mouthpiece of "that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge: Urania, heavenly muse," visits him nightly,

> And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, ix. 24.

Urania bestows the flowing words and musical sweetness; to God's Spirit he looks to

> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence

> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, iii. 50.

The singers with whom he would fain equal himself are not Dante, or Tasso, or, as Dryden would have it, Spenser, but

> Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.

As he is equalled with these in misfortune—loss of sight—he would emulate them in function. Orpheus and Musæus are the poets he would fain have as the companions of his midnight meditation (*Penseroso*). And the function of the poet is like that of the prophet in the old dispensation, not to invent, but to utter. It is God's truth which passes his lips—lips hallowed by the touch of sacred fire. He is the passive instrument through whom flows the emanation from on high; his words are not his own, but a suggestion. Even for style Milton is indebted to his "celestial patroness who deigns her nightly visitation unimplor'd."

Milton was not dependent upon a dubious tradition in the subject he had selected. Man's fall and recovery were recorded in the Scriptures. And the two media of truth, the internal and the external, as deriving from the same source, must needs be in harmony. That the Spirit enlightens the mind within, in this belief the Puritan saint, the poet, and the prophet, who all met in Milton, were at one. That the Old Testament Scriptures were also a revelation from God, was an article of faith which he had never questioned. Nor did he only receive these books as conveying in substance a divine view of the world's history, he regarded them as in the letter a transcript of fact.

If the poet-prophet would tell the story of creation or redemption, he was thus restrained not only by the general outline and imagery of the Bible, but by its very words. And here we must note the skill of the poet in surmounting an added or artificial difficulty, in the subject he had chosen as combined with his notion of inspiration. He must not deviate in a single syllable from the words of the Hebrew books. He must take up into his poem the whole of the sacred narrative. This he must do, not merely because his readers would expect such literal accuracy from him, but because to himself that narrative was the very truth which he was undertaking to deliver. The additions which his fancy or inspiration might supply must be restrained by this severe law, that they should be such as to aid the reader's imagination to conceive how the event took place. They must by no means be suffered to alter, disfigure, traduce the substance or the letter of the revelation. This is what Milton has done. He has told the story of creation in the very words of Scripture. The whole of the seventh book, is little more than a paraphrase of a few verses of Genesis. What he has added is so little incongruous with his original, that most English men and women would probably have some difficulty in discriminating in recollection the part they derive from Moses, from that which they have added from the paraphrast. In Genesis it is the serpent who tempts Eve, in virtue of his natural wiliness. In Milton it is Satan who has entered into the body of a serpent, and supplied the intelligence. Here indeed Milton was only adopting a gloss, as ancient at least as the Book of Wisdom (ii. 24). But it is the gloss, and not the text of Moses, which is in possession of our minds, and who has done most to lodge it there, Milton or the commentators?

Again, it is Milton and not Moses who makes the serpent pluck and eat the first apple from the tree. But Bp. Wilson comments upon the words of Genesis (iii. 6) as though they contained this purely Miltonic circumstance.

It could hardly but be that one or two of the incidents which Milton has supplied, the popular imagination has been unable to homologate. Such an incident is the placing of artillery in the wars in heaven. We reject this suggestion, and find it mars probability. But it would not seem so improbable to Milton's contemporaries, not only because it was an article of the received poetic tradition (see *Ronsard* 6, p. 40), but also because fire-arms had not quite ceased to be regarded as a devilish enginery of a new warfare, unfair in the knightly code of honour, a base substitute of mechanism for individual valour. It was gunpowder and not *Don Quixote* which had destroyed the age of chivalry.

Another of Milton's fictions which has been found too grotesque is the change (*P. L.*, x. 508) of the demons into serpents, who hiss their Prince on his return from his embassy. Here it is not, I think, so much the unnatural character of the incident itself, as its gratuitousness which offends. It does not help us to conceive the situation. A suggestion of Chateaubriand may therefore go some way towards reconciling the reader even to this caprice of imagination. It indicates, he says, the degradation of Satan, who, from the superb Intelligence of the early scenes of the poem, is become at its close a hideous reptile. He has not triumphed, but has failed, and is degraded into the old dragon, who haunts among the damned. The bruising of his head has already commenced.

The bridge, again, which Sin and Death construct

(*Paradise Lost*, x. 300), leading from the mouth of hell to the wall of the world, has a chilling effect upon the imagination of a modern reader. It does not assist the conception of the cosmical system which we accept in the earlier books. This clumsy fiction seems more at home in the grotesque and lawless mythology of the Turks, or in the Persian poet Sadi, who is said by Marmontel to have adopted it from the Turk. If Milton's intention were to reproduce Jacob's ladder, he should, like Dante (*Parad.* xxi. 25), have made it the means of communication between heaven and earth.

It is possible that Milton himself, after the experiment of *Paradise Lost* was fully before him, suspected that he had supplemented too much for his purpose; that his imagery, which was designed to illustrate history, might stand in its light. For in the composition of *Paradise Regained* (published 1671) he has adopted a much severer style. In this poem he has not only curbed his imagination, but has almost suppressed it. He has amplified, but has hardly introduced any circumstance which is not in the original. *Paradise Regained* is little more than a paraphrase of the Temptation as found in the synoptical gospels. It is a marvel of ingenuity that more than two thousand lines of blank verse can have been constructed out of some twenty lines of prose, without the addition of any invented incident, or the insertion of any irrelevant digression. In the first three books of *Paradise Regained* there is not a single simile. Nor yet can it be said that the version of the gospel narrative has the fault of most paraphrases, viz., that of weakening the effect, and obliterating the chiselled features of the original. Let a reader take *Paradise Regained* not as a theme used as a canvas for poetical embroidery, an opportunity for an author

to show off his powers of writing, but as a *bonâ fide* attempt to impress upon the mind the story of the Temptation, and he will acknowledge the concealed art of the genuine epic poet, bent before all things upon telling his tale. It will still be capable of being alleged that the story told does not interest; that the composition is dry, hard, barren; the style as of set purpose divested of the attributes of poetry. It is not necessary indeed that an epic should be in twelve books; but we do demand in an epic poem multiplicity of character and variety of incident. In *Paradise Regained* there are only two personages, both of whom are supernatural. Indeed, they can scarcely be called personages; the poet, in his fidelity to the letter, not having thought fit to open up the fertile vein of delineation which was afforded by the human character of Christ. The speakers are no more than the abstract principles of good and evil, two voices who hold a rhetorical disputation through four books and two thousand lines.

The usual explanation of the frigidity of *Paradise Regained* is the suggestion, which is nearest at hand, viz., that it is the effect of age. Like Ben Jonson's *New Inn*, it betrays the feebleness of senility, and has one of the most certain marks of that stage of authorship, the attempt to imitate himself in those points in which he was once strong. When "glad no more, He wears a face of joy, because He has been glad of yore." Or it is an "œuvre de lassitude," a continuation, with the inevitable defect of continuations, that of preserving the forms and wanting the soul of the original, like the second parts of *Faust*, of *Don Quixote*, and of so many other books.

Both these explanations of the inferiority of *Paradise Regained* have probability. Either of them may be true,

or both may have concurred to the common effect. In favour of the hypothesis of senility is the fact, recorded by Phillips, that Milton "could not hear with patience any such thing when related to him." The reader will please to note that this is the original statement, which the critics have improved into the statement that he preferred *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*. But his approval of his work, even if it did not amount to preference, looks like the old man's fondness for his youngest and weakest offspring.

Another view of the matter, however, is at least possible. Milton's theory as to the true mode of handling a biblical subject was, as I have said, to add no more dressing, or adventitious circumstance, than should assist the conception of the sacred verity. After he had executed *Paradise Lost*, the suspicion arose that he had been too indulgent to his imagination; that he had created too much. He would make a second experiment, in which he would enforce his theory with more vigour. In the composition of *Paradise Lost* he must have experienced that the constraint he imposed upon himself had generated, as was said of Racine, "a plenitude of soul." He might infer that were the compression carried still further, the reaction of the spirit might be still increased. Poetry he had said long before should be "simple, sensuous, impassioned" (*Tractate of Education*). Nothing enhances passion like simplicity. So in *Paradise Regained* Milton has carried simplicity of dress to the verge of nakedness. It is probably the most unadorned poem extant in any language. He has pushed severe abstinence to the extreme point, possibly beyond the point, where a reader's power is stimulated by the poet's parsimony.

It may elucidate the intention of the author of *Para-*

dise Regained, if we contrast it for a moment with a poem constructed upon the opposite principle, that, viz., of the maximum of adornment. Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine* (A.D. 400) is one of the most rich and elaborate poems ever written. It has in common with Milton the circumstance that its whole action is contained in a solitary event, viz., the carrying off of Proserpine from the vale of Henna by Pluto. All the personages, too, are superhuman; and the incident itself supernatural. Claudian's ambition was to overlay his story with the gold and jewellery of expression and invention. Nothing is named without being carved, decked, and coloured from the inexhaustible resources of the poet's treasury. This is not done with ostentatious pomp, as the hyperbolical heroes of vulgar novelists are painted, but always with taste, which though lavish is discriminating.

Milton, like Wordsworth, urged his theory of parsimony further in practice than he would have done, had he not been possessed by a spirit of protest against prevailing error. Milton's own ideal was the chiselled austerity of Greek tragedy. But he was impelled to overdo the system of holding back, by his desire to challenge the evil spirit which was abroad. He would separate himself not only from the Clevelands, the Denhams, and the Drydens, whom he did not account as poets at all, but even from the Spenserians. Thus, instead of severe, he became rigid, and his plainness is not unfrequently jejune.

"Pomp and ostentation of reading," he had once written, "is admired among the vulgar; but, in matters of religion, he is learnedest who is plainest." As Wordsworth had attempted to regenerate poetry by recurring to nature and to common objects, Milton would revert to

the pure Word of God. He would present no human adumbration of goodness, but Christ Himself. He saw that here absolute plainness was best. In the presence of this unique Being silence alone became the poet. This "higher argument" was "sufficient of itself" (*Paradise Lost*, ix. 42).

There are some painters whose work appeals only to painters, and not to the public. So the judgment of poets and critics has been more favourable to *Paradise Regained* than the opinion of the average reader. Johnson thinks that "if it had been written, not by Milton, but by some imitators, it would receive universal praise." Wordsworth thought it "the most perfect in execution of anything written by Milton." And Coleridge says of it, "in its kind it is the most perfect poem extant."

There is a school of critics which maintains that a poem is, like a statue or a picture, a work of pure art, of which beauty is the only characteristic of which the reader should be cognisant. And beauty is wholly ideal, an absolute quality, out of relation to person, time, or circumstance. To such readers *Samson Agonistes* will seem tame, flat, meaningless, and artificial. From the point of view of the critic of the eighteenth century, it is "a tragedy which only ignorance would admire and bigotry applaud" (Dr. Johnson). If, on the other hand, it be read as a page of cotemporary history, it becomes human, pregnant with real woe, the record of an heroic soul, not baffled by temporary adversity, but totally defeated by an irreversible fate, and unflinchingly accepting the situation, in the firm conviction of the righteousness of the cause. If fiction is truer than fact, fact is more tragic than fiction. In the course of the long struggle of human liberty against the

church, there had been terrible catastrophes. But the St. Bartholomew, the Revocation of the Edict, the Spanish Inquisition, the rule of Alva in the Low Countries,—these and other days of suffering and rebuke have been left to the dull pen of the annalist, who has variously diluted their story in his literary circumlocution office. The triumphant royalist reaction of 1660, when the old serpent bruised the heel of freedom by totally crushing Puritanism, is singular in this, that the agonised cry of the beaten party has been preserved in a cotemporary monument, the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets—the *Samson Agonistes.*

In the covert representation, which we have in this drama, of the actual wreck of Milton, his party, and his cause, is supplied that real basis of truth which was necessary to inspire him to write. It is of little moment that the incidents of Samson's life do not form a strict parallel to those of Milton's life, or to the career of the Puritan cause. The resemblance lies in the sentiment and situation, not in the bare event. The glorious youth of the consecrated deliverer, his signal overthrow of the Philistine foe with means so inadequate that the hand of God was manifest in the victory; his final humiliation, which he owed to his own weakness and disobedience, and the present revelry and feasting of the uncircumcised Philistines in the temple of their idol,—all these things together constitute a parable of which no reader of Milton's day could possibly mistake the interpretation. More obscurely adumbrated is the day of vengeance, when virtue should return to the repentant backslider, and the idolatrous crew should be smitten with a swift destruction in the midst of their insolent revelry. Add to these the two great personal misfortunes of the poet's life, his first

marriage with a Philistine woman, out of sympathy with him or his cause, and his blindness; and the basis of reality becomes so complete, that the nominal personages of the drama almost disappear behind the history which we read through them.

But while for the biographer of Milton *Samson Agonistes* is charged with a pathos, which as the expression of real suffering no fictive tragedy can equal, it must be felt that as a composition the drama is languid, nerveless, occasionally halting, never brilliant. If the date of the composition of the *Samson* be 1663, this may have been the result of weariness after the effort of *Paradise Lost*. If this drama were composed in 1667, it would be the author's last poetical effort, and the natural explanation would then be that his power over language was failing. The power of metaphor, i. e. of indirect expression, is, according to Aristotle, the characteristic of genius. It springs from vividness of conception of the thing spoken of. It is evident that this intense action of the presentative faculty is no longer at the disposal of the writer of *Samson*. In *Paradise Regained* we are conscious of a purposed restraint of strength. The simplicity of its style is an experiment, an essay of a new theory of poetic words. The simplicity of *Samson Agonistes* is a flagging of the forces, a drying up of the rich sources from which had once flowed the golden stream of suggestive phrase which makes *Paradise Lost* a unique monument of the English language. I could almost fancy that the consciousness of decay utters itself in the lines (594)—

> I feel my genial spirits droop,
> My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
> In all her functions weary of herself,

> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

The point of view I have insisted on is that Milton conceives a poet to be one who employs his imagination to make a revelation of truth, truth which the poet himself entirely believes. One objection to this point of view will at once occur to the reader, the habitual employment in both poems of the fictions of pagan mythology. This is an objection as old as Miltonic criticism. The objection came from those readers who had no difficulty in realising the biblical scenes, or in accepting demoniac agency, but who found their imagination repelled by the introduction of the gods of Greece or Rome. It is not that the biblical heaven and the Greek Olympus are incongruous, but it is that the unreal is blended with the real, in a way to destroy credibility.

To this objection the answer has been supplied by De Quincey. To Milton the personages of the heathen Pantheon were not merely familiar fictions, or established poetical properties; they were evil spirits. That they were so was the creed of the early interpreters. In their demonology, the Hebrew and the Greek poets had a common ground. Up to the advent of Christ, the fallen angels had been permitted to delude mankind. To Milton, as to Jerome, Moloch was Mars, and Chemosh Priapus. Plato knew of hell as Tartarus, and the battle of the giants in Hesiod is no fiction, but an obscured tradition of the war once waged in heaven. What has been adverse to Milton's art of illusion is, that the belief that the gods of the heathen world were the rebellious angels has ceased to be part of the common creed of Christendom. Milton was nearly the last of our great writers who was fully possessed of the doctrine. His readers now no

longer share it with the poet. In Addison's time (1712) some of the imaginary persons in *Paradise Lost* were beginning to make greater demands upon the faith of readers, than those cool rationalistic times could meet.

There is an element of decay and death in poems which we vainly style immortal. Some of the sources of Milton's power are already in process of drying up. I do not speak of the ordinary caducity of language, in virtue of which every effusion of the human spirit is lodged in a body of death. Milton suffers little as yet from this cause. There are few lines in his poems which are less intelligible now, than they were at the time they were written. This is partly to be ascribed to his limited vocabulary, Milton, in his verse, using not more than eight thousand words, or about half the number used by Shakespeare. Nay, the position of our earlier writers has been improved by the mere spread of the English language over a wider area. Addison apologised for *Paradise Lost* falling short of the *Æneid*, because of the inferiority of the language in which it was written. "So divine a poem in English is like a stately palace built of brick." The defects of English for purposes of rhythm and harmony are as great now as they ever were, but the space that our speech fills in the world is vastly increased, and this increase of consideration is reflected back upon our older writers.

But if, as a treasury of poetic speech, *Paradise Lost* has gained by time, it has lost far more as a storehouse of divine truth. We at this day are better able than ever to appreciate its force of expression, its grace of phrase, its harmony of rhythmical movement, but it is losing its hold over our imagination. Strange to say, this failure of vital power in the constitution of the poem is

due to the very selection of subject by which Milton sought to secure perpetuity. Not content with being the poet of men, and with describing human passions and ordinary events, he aspired to present the destiny of the whole race of mankind, to tell the story of creation, and to reveal the councils of heaven and hell. And he would raise this structure upon no unstable base, but upon the sure foundation of the written word. It would have been a thing incredible to Milton that the hold of the Jewish Scriptures over the imagination of English men and women could ever be weakened. This process, however, has already commenced. The demonology of the poem has already, with educated readers, passed from the region of fact into that of fiction. Not so universally, but with a large number of readers, the angelology can be no more than what the critics call machinery. And it requires a violent effort from any of our day to accommodate their conceptions to the anthropomorphic theology of *Paradise Lost*. Were the sapping process to continue at the same rate for two more centuries, the possibility of epic illusion would be lost to the whole scheme and economy of the poem. Milton has taken a scheme of life for life itself. Had he, in the choice of subject, remembered the principle of the Aristotelean Poetic (which he otherwise highly prized), that men in action are the poet's proper theme, he would have raised his imaginative fabric on a more permanent foundation; upon the appetites, passions, and emotions of men, their vices and virtues, their aims and ambitions, which are a far more constant quantity than any theological system. This perhaps was what Goethe meant, when he pronounced the subject of *Paradise Lost* to be "abominable, with a fair outside, but rotten inwardly."

Whatever fortune may be in store for *Paradise Lost* in the time to come, Milton's choice of subject was, at the time he wrote, the only one which offered him the guarantees of reality, authenticity, and divine truth, which he required. We need not therefore search the annals of literature to find the poem which may have given the first suggestion of the fall of man as a subject. This, however, has been done by curious antiquaries, and a list of more than two dozen authors has been made, from one or other of whom Milton may have taken either the general idea or particular hints for single incidents. Milton, without being a very wide reader, was likely to have seen the *Adamus Exul* of Grotius (1601), and he certainly had read Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610). There are traces of verbal reminiscence of Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas*. But out of the long catalogue of his predecessors there appear only three, who can claim to have conceived the same theme with anything like the same breadth, or on the same scale as Milton has done. These are the so-called Cædmon, Andreini, and Vondel.

1. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem which passes under the name of Cædmon has this one point of resemblance to the plot of *Paradise Lost*, that in it the seduction of Eve is Satan's revenge for his expulsion from heaven. As Francis Junius was much occupied upon this poem of which he published the text in 1655, it is likely enough that he should have talked of it with his friend Milton.

2. Voltaire related that Milton during his tour in Italy (1638) had seen performed *L'Adamo*, a sacred drama by the Florentine Giovanni Battista Andreini, and that he "took from that ridiculous trifle" the hint of the "noblest product of human imagination." Though Voltaire relates

this as a matter of fact, it is doubtful if it be more than an *on dit* which he had picked up in London society. Voltaire could not have seen Andreini's drama, for it is not at all a ridiculous trifle. Though much of the dialogue is as insipid as dialogue in operettas usually is, there is great invention in the plot, and animation in the action. Andreini is incessantly offending against taste, and is infected with the vice of the Marinists, the pursuit of *concetti*, or far-fetched analogies between things unlike. His infernal personages are grotesque and disgusting, rather than terrible; his scenes in heaven childish —at once familiar and fantastic, in the style of the Mysteries of the age before the drama. With all these faults the *Adamo* is a lively and spirited representation of the Hebrew legend, and not unworthy to have been the antecedent of *Paradise Lost*. There is no question of plagiarism, for the resemblance is not even that of imitation or parentage, or adoption. The utmost that can be conceded is to concur in Hayley's opinion that, either in representation or in perusal, the *Adamo* of Andreini had made an impression on the mind of Milton; had, as Voltaire says, revealed to him the hidden majesty of the subject. There had been at least three editions of the *Adamo* by 1641, and Milton may have brought one of these with him, among the books which he had shipped from Venice, even, if he had not seen the drama on the Italian stage, or had not, as Todd suggests, met Andreini in person.

So much appears to me to be certain from the internal evidence of the two compositions as they stand. But there are further some slight corroborative circumstances. (i.) The Trinity College sketch, so often referred to, of Milton's scheme when it was intended to be dramatic,

keeps much more closely, both in its personages and in its ordering, to Andreini. (ii.) In Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum*, a compilation in which he had his uncle's help, Andreini is mentioned as author "of a fantastic poem entitled Olivastro, which was printed at Bologna, 1642." If Andreini was known to Edward Phillips, the inference is that he was known to Milton.

3. Lastly, though external evidence is here wanting, it cannot be doubted that Milton was acquainted with the *Lucifer* of the Dutch poet, Joost van den Vondel, which appeared in 1654. This poem is a regular five-act drama in the Dutch language, a language which Milton was able to read. In spite of commercial rivalry and naval war there was much intercourse between the two republics, and Amsterdam books came in regular course to London. The Dutch drama turns entirely on the revolt of the angels, and their expulsion from heaven, the fall of man being but a subordinate incident. In *Paradise Lost* the relation of the two events is inverted, the fall of the angels being there an episode, not transacted, but told by one of the personages of the epic. It is therefore only in one book of *Paradise Lost*, the sixth, that the influence of Vondel can be looked for. There may possibly occur in other parts of our epic single lines of which an original may be found in Vondel's drama. Notably such a one is the often-quoted—

> Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.
> *Paradise Lost*, i. 263.

which is Vondel's—

> En liever d'eerste Vorst in eenigh lager hof
> Dan in't gezalight licht de tweede, of noch een minder!

But it is in the sixth book only in which anything more

than a verbal similarity is traceable. According to Mr. Gosse, who has given an analysis, with some translated extracts, of Vondel's *Lucifer*, the resemblances are too close and too numerous to be mere coincidences. Vondel is more human than Milton, just where human attributes are unnatural, so that heaven is made to seem like earth, while in *Paradise Lost* we always feel that we are in a region aloft. Miltonic presentation has a dignity and elevation, which is not only wanting but is sadly missed in the Dutch drama, even the language of which seems common and familiar.

The poems now mentioned form, taken together, the antecedents of *Paradise Lost*. In no one instance, taken singly, is the relation of Milton to a predecessor that of imitation, not even to the extent in which the Æneid, for instance, is an imitation of the Iliad and Odyssey. The originality of Milton lies not in his subject, but in his manner; not in his thoughts, but in his mode of thinking. His story and his personages, their acts and words, had been the common property of all poets since the fall of the Roman Empire. Not only the three I have specially named had boldly attempted to set forth a mythical representation of the origin of evil, but many others had fluttered round the same central object of poetic attraction. Many of these productions Milton had read, and they had made their due impression on his mind according to their degree of force. When he began to compose *Paradise Lost* he had the reading of a life-time behind him. His imagination worked upon an accumulated store, to which books, observation, and reflection had contributed in equal proportions. He drew upon this store without conscious distinction of its sources. Not that this was a recollected material, to which the poet had recourse whenever inven-

tion failed him; it was identified with himself. His verse flowed from his own soul, but his was a soul which had grown up nourished with the spoil of all the ages. He created his epic, as metaphysicians have said that God created the world, by drawing it out of himself, not by building it up out of elements supplied *ab extra*.

The resemblances to earlier poets, Greek, Latin, Italian, which could be pointed out in *Paradise Lost*, were so numerous that in 1695, only twenty-one years after Milton's death, an editor, one Patrick Hume, a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood of London, was employed by Tonson to point out the imitations in an annotated edition. From that time downwards, the diligence of our literary antiquaries has been busily employed in the same track of research, and it has been extended to the English poets, a field which was overlooked, or not known to the first collector. The result is a valuable accumulation of parallel passages, which have been swept up into our *variorum* Miltons, and make *Paradise Lost*, for English phraseology, what Virgil was for Latin in the middle ages, the centre round which the study moves. The learner, who desires to cultivate his feeling for the fine shades and variations of expression, has here a rich opportunity, and will acknowledge with gratitude the laborious services of Newton, Pearce, the Wartons, Todd, Mitford, and other compilers. But these heaped-up citations of parallel passages somewhat tend to hide from us the secret of Miltonic language. We are apt to think that the magical effect of Milton's words has been produced by painfully inlaying tesseræ of borrowed metaphor—a mosaic of bits culled from extensive reading, carried along by a retentive memory, and pieced together so as to produce a new whole, with the exquisite art of a Japanese cabinet-maker. It is some-

times admitted that Milton was a plagiary, but it is urged in extenuation that his plagiarisms were always reproduced in finer forms.

It is not in the spirit of vindicating Milton, but as touching the mystery of metrical language, that I dwell a few moments upon this misconception. It is true that Milton has a way of making his own even what he borrows. While Horace's thefts from Alcæus or Pindar are palpable, even from the care which he takes to Latinise them, Milton cannot help transfusing his own nature into the words he adopts. But this is far from all. When Milton's widow was asked "if he did not often read Homer and Virgil, she understood it as an imputation upon him for stealing from those authors, and answered with eagerness, that he stole from nobody but the muse who inspired him." This is more true than she knew. It is true there are many phrases or images in *Paradise Lost* taken from earlier writers—taken, not stolen, for the borrowing is done openly. When Adam, for instance, begs Raphael to prolong his discourse deep into night,—

> Sleep, listening to thee, will watch;
> Or we can bid his absence, till thy song
> End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine;

we cannot be mistaken in saying that we have here a conscious reminiscence of the words of Alcinous to Ulysses in the eleventh book of the Odyssey. Such imitation is on the surface, and does not touch the core of that mysterious combination of traditive with original elements in diction, which Milton and Virgil, alone of poets known to us, have effected. Here and there, many times, in detached places, Milton has consciously imitated. But, beyond this obvious indebtedness, there runs through the whole

texture of his verse a suggestion of secondary meaning, a meaning which has been accreted to the words, by their passage down the consecrated stream of classical poetry. Milton quotes very little for a man of much reading. He says of himself (*Judgment of Bucer*) that he "never could delight in long citations, much less in whole traductions, whether it be natural disposition or education in me, or that my mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator." And the observation is as old as Bishop Newton, that "there is scarce any author who has written so much, and upon such various subjects, and yet quotes so little from his cotemporary authors." It is said that "he could repeat Homer almost all without book." But we know that common minds are apt to explain to themselves the working of mental superiority, by exaggerating the power of memory. Milton's own writings remain a sufficient evidence that his was not a verbal memory. And, psychologically, the power of imagination and the power of verbal memory, are almost always found in inverse proportion.

Milton's diction is the elaborated outcome of all the best words of all antecedent poetry, not by a process of recollected reading and storage, but by the same mental habit by which we learn to speak our mother tongue. Only, in the case of the poet, the vocabulary acquired has a new meaning superadded to the words, from the occasion on which they have been previously employed by others. Words, over and above their dictionary signification, connote all the feeling which has gathered round them by reason of their employment through a hundred generations of song. In the words of Mr. Myers, "without ceasing to be a logical step in the argument, a phrase becomes a centre of emotional force. The complex associations which

it evokes, modify the associations evoked by other words in the same passage, in a way distinct from logical or grammatical connection." The poet suggests much more than he says, or as Milton himself has phrased it, "more is meant than meets the ear."

For the purposes of poetry a thought is the representative of many feelings, and a word is the representative of many thoughts. A single word may thus set in motion in us the vibration of a feeling first consigned to letters 3000 years ago. For oratory words should be winged, that they may do their work of persuasion. For poetry words should be freighted with associations of feeling, that they may awaken sympathy. It is the suggestive power of words that the poet cares for, rather than their current denotation. How laughable are the attempts of the commentators to interpret a line in Virgil as they would a sentence in Aristotle's *Physics!* Milton's secret lies in his mastery over the rich treasure of this inherited vocabulary. He wielded it as his own, as a second mother-tongue, the native and habitual idiom of his thought and feeling, backed by a massive frame of character, and "a power which is got within me to a passion." (*Areopagitica.*)

When Wordsworth came forward at the end of the eighteenth century with his famous reform of the language of English poetry, the Miltonic diction was the current coin paid out by every versifier. Wordsworth revolted against this dialect as unmeaning, hollow, gaudy, and inane. His reform consisted in dropping the consecrated phraseology altogether, and reverting to the common language of ordinary life. It was necessary to do this in order to reconnect poetry with the sympathies of men, and make it again a true utterance instead of the ingenious exercise in

putting together words, which it had become. In projecting this abandonment of the received tradition, it may be thought that Wordsworth was condemning the Miltonic system of expression in itself. But this was not so. Milton's language had become in the hands of the imitators of the eighteenth century sound without sense, a husk without the kernel, a body of words without the soul of poetry. Milton had created and wielded an instrument which was beyond the control of any less than himself. He used it as a living language; the poetasters of the eighteenth century wrote it as a dead language, as boys make Latin verses. Their poetry is to *Paradise Lost*, as a modern Gothic restoration is to a genuine middle-age church. It was against the feeble race of imitators, and not against the master himself, that the protest of the lake poet was raised. He proposed to do away with the Miltonic vocabulary altogether, not because it was in itself vicious, but because it could now only be employed at secondhand.

One drawback there was attendant upon the style chosen by Milton, viz. that it narrowly limited the circle of his readers. All words are addressed to those who understand them. The Welsh triads are not for those who have not learnt Welsh; an English poem is only for those who understand English. But of understanding English there are many degrees; it requires some education to understand literary style at all. A large majority of the natives of any country possess, and use, only a small fraction of their mother tongue. These people may be left out of the discussion. Confining ourselves only to that small part of our millions which we speak of as the educated classes, that is those whose schooling is carried on beyond fourteen years of age, it will be found that only a small fraction of

the men, and a still smaller fraction of the women, fully apprehend the meaning of words. This is the case with what is written in the ordinary language of books. When we pass from a style in which words have only their simple signification, to a style of which the effect depends on the suggestion of collateral association, we leave behind the majority even of these few. This is what is meant by the standing charge against Milton that he is too learned.

It is no paradox to say that Milton was not a learned man. Such men there were in his day, Usher, Selden, Voss, in England; in Holland, Milton's adversary Salmasius, and many more. A learned man was one who could range freely and surely over the whole of classical and patristic remains in the Greek and Latin languages (at least), with the accumulated stores of philological, chronological, historical criticism, necessary for the interpretation of those remains. Milton had neither made these acquisitions, nor aimed at them. He even expresses himself, in his vehement way, with contempt of them. "Hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk," "marginal stuffings," "horse-loads of citations and fathers," are some of his petulant outbursts against the learning that had been played upon his position by his adversaries. He says expressly that he had "not read the Councils, save here and there" (*Smectymnuus*). His own practice had been "industrious and select reading." He chose to make himself a scholar rather than a learned man. The aim of his studies was to improve faculty, not to acquire knowledge. "Who would be a poet must himself be a true poem;" his heart should "contain of just, wise, good, the perfect shape." He devoted himself to self-preparation with the assiduity of Petrarch or of Goethe. "In weari-

some labour and studious watchings I have tired out almost a whole youth." "Labour and intense study I take to be my portion in this life." He would know, not all, but "what was of use to know," and form himself by assiduous culture. The first Englishman to whom the designation of our series, *Men of Letters*, is appropriate, Milton was also the noblest example of the type. He cultivated, not letters, but himself, and sought to enter into possession of his own mental kingdom, not that he might reign there, but that he might royally use its resources in building up a work, which should bring honour to his country and his native tongue.

The style of *Paradise Lost* is then only the natural expression of a soul thus exquisitely nourished upon the best thoughts and finest words of all ages. It is the language of one who lives in the companionship of the great and the wise of past time. It is inevitable that when such a one speaks, his tones, his accent, the melodies of his rhythm, the inner harmonies of his linked thoughts, the grace of his allusive touch, should escape the common ear. To follow Milton one should at least have tasted the same training through which he put himself. "Te quoque dignum finge deo." The many cannot see it, and complain that the poet is too learned. They would have Milton talk like Bunyan or William Cobbett, whom they understand. Milton did attempt the demagogue in his pamphlets, only with the result of blemishing his fame and degrading his genius. The best poetry is that which calls upon us to rise to it, not that which writes down to us.

Milton knew that his was not the road to popularity. He thirsted for renown, but he did not confound renown with vogue. A poet has his choice between the many and the few; Milton chose the few. "Paucis hujusmodi

lectoribus contentus," is his own inscription in a copy of his pamphlets sent by him to Patrick Young. He derived a stern satisfaction from the reprobation with which the vulgar visited him. His divorce tracts were addressed to men who dared to think, and ran the town "numbering good intellects." His poems he wished laid up in the Bodleian Library, "where the jabber of common people cannot penetrate, and whence the base throng of readers keep aloof" (*Ode to Rouse*). If Milton resembled a Roman republican in the severe and stoic elevation of his character, he also shared the aristocratic intellectualism of the classical type. He is in marked contrast to the levelling hatred of excellence, the Christian trades-unionism of the model Catholic of the mould of S. François de Sales, whose maxim of life is "marchons avec la troupe de nos frères et compagnons, doucement, paisiblement, et amiablement." To Milton the people are—

> But a herd confus'd,
> A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
> Things vulgar.
>
> *Paradise Regained*, iii. 49.

At times his indignation carries him past the courtesies of equal speech, to pour out the vials of prophetic rebuke, when he contemplates the hopeless struggle of those who are the salt of the earth, "amidst the throng and noises of vulgar and irrational men" (*Tenure of Kings*), and he rates them to their face as "owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs" (*Sonnet* XII.); not because they will not listen to him, but because they "hate learning more than toad or asp" (*Sonnet* IX.).

Milton's attitude must be distinguished from patrician pride, or the *noli-me-tangere* of social exclusiveness. Nor, again, was it, like Callimachus's, the fastidious repulsion

of a delicate taste for the hackneyed in literary expression; it was the lofty disdain of aspiring virtue for the sordid and ignoble.

Various ingredients, constitutional or circumstantial, concurred to produce this repellent or unsympathetic attitude in Milton. His dogmatic Calvinism, from the effects of which his mind never recovered—a system which easily disposes to a cynical abasement of our fellow-men—counted for something. Something must be set down to habitual converse with the classics—a converse which tends to impart to character, as Platner said of Godfrey Hermann, "a certain grandeur and generosity, removed from the spirit of cabal and mean cunning which prevail among men of the world." His blindness threw him out of the competition of life, and back upon himself, in a way which was sure to foster egotism. These were constitutional elements of that aloofness from men which characterised all his utterance. These disposing causes became inexorable fate, when, by the turn of the political wheel of fortune, he found himself alone amid the mindless dissipation and reckless materialism of the Restoration. He felt himself then at war with human society as constituted around him, and was thus driven to withdraw himself within a poetic world of his own creation.

In this antagonism of the poet to his age much was lost; much energy was consumed in what was mere friction. The artist is then most powerful when he finds himself in accord with the age he lives in. The plenitude of art is only reached when it marches with the sentiments which possess a community. The defiant attitude easily slides into paradox, and the mind falls in love with its own wilfulness. The exceptional emergence

of Milton's three poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Regained*, and *Samson*, deeply colours their context. The greatest achievements of art in their kinds have been the capital specimens of a large crop; as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the picked lines out of many rhapsodies, and Shakespeare the king of an army of contemporary dramatists. Milton was a survival, felt himself such, and resented it.

> Unchang'd,
> . . . . . Though fall'n on evil days,
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,
> And solitude.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, vii. 24.

Poetry thus generated we should naturally expect to meet with more admiration than sympathy. And such, on the whole, has been Milton's reception. In 1678, twenty years after the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Prior spoke of him (*Hind transversed*) as "a rough, unhewn fellow, that a man must sweat to read him." And in 1842, Hallam had doubts "if *Paradise Lost*, published eleven years since, would have met with a greater demand" than it did at first. It has been much disputed by historians of our literature what inference is to be drawn from the numbers sold of *Paradise Lost* at its first publication. Between 1667 and 1678, a space of twenty years, three editions had been printed, making together some 4500 copies. Was this a large or a small circulation? Opinions are at variance on the point. Johnson and Hallam thought it a large sale, as books went at that time. Campbell, and the majority of our annalists of books, have considered it as evidence of neglect. Comparison with what is known of other cases of circulation leads to no more certain conclusion. On

the one hand, the public could not take more than three editions—say 3000 copies—of the plays of Shakespeare in sixty years, from 1623 to 1684. If this were a fair measure of possible circulation at the time, we should have to pronounce Milton's sale a great success. On the other hand, Cleveland's poems ran through sixteen or seventeen editions in about thirty years. If this were the average output of a popular book, the inference would be that *Paradise Lost* was not such a book.

Whatever conclusion may be the true one from the amount of the public demand, we cannot be wrong in asserting that from the first, and now as then, *Paradise Lost* has been more admired than read. The poet's wish and expectation that he should find "fit audience, though few," has been fulfilled. Partly this has been due to his limitation, his unsympathetic disposition, the deficiency of the human element in his imagination, and his presentation of mythical instead of real beings. But it is also in part a tribute to his excellence, and is to be ascribed to the lofty strain which requires more effort to accompany, than an average reader is able to make, a majestic demeanour which no parodist has been able to degrade, and a wealth of allusion demanding more literature than is possessed by any but the few whose life is lived with the poets. An appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship; and we may apply to him what Quintilian has said of Cicero, "Ille se profecisse sciat, cui Cicero valde placebit."

Causes other than the inherent faults of the poem long continued to weigh down the reputation of *Paradise Lost*. In Great Britain the sense for art, poetry, literature, is confined to a few, while our political life has been diffused and vigorous. Hence all judgment, even

upon a poet, is biassed by considerations of party. Before 1688 it was impossible that the poet, who had justified regicide, could have any public beyond the suppressed and crouching Nonconformists. The Revolution of 1688 removed this ban, and from that date forward the Liberal party in England adopted Milton as the republican poet. William Hogg, writing in 1690, says of *Paradise Lost* that "the fame of the poem is spread through the whole of England, but being written in English, it is as yet unknown in foreign lands." This is obvious exaggeration. Lauder, about 1748, gives the date exactly, when he speaks of "that infinite tribute of veneration that has been paid to him *these sixty years past*." One distinguished exception there was. Dryden, royalist and Catholic though he was, was loyal to his art. Nothing which Dryden ever wrote is so creditable to his taste, as his being able to see, and daring to confess, in the day of disesteem, that the regicide poet alone deserved the honour which his cotemporaries were for rendering to himself. Dryden's saying, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too," is not perfectly well vouched, but it would hardly have been invented, if it had not been known to express his sentiments. And Dryden's sense of Milton's greatness grew with his taste. When, in the preface to his *State of Innocence* (1674), Dryden praised *Paradise Lost*, he "knew not half the extent of its excellence," John Dennis says, "as more than twenty years afterwards he confessed to me." Had he known it, he never could have produced his vulgar parody, *The State of Innocence*, a piece upon which he received the compliments of his cotemporaries, as "having refined the ore of Milton."

With the one exception of Dryden, a better critic than

poet, Milton's repute was the work of the Whigs. The first *édition de luxe* of *Paradise Lost* (1688) was brought out by a subscription got up by the Whig leader, Lord Somers. In this edition Dryden's pinchbeck epigram so often quoted, first appeared—

> Three poets in three distant ages born, &c.

It was the Whig essayist, Addison, whose papers in the *Spectator* (1712) did most to make the poem popularly known. In 1737, in the height of the Whig ascendancy, the bust of Milton penetrated Westminster Abbey, though, in the generation before, the Dean of that day had refused to admit an inscription on the monument erected to John Phillips, because the name of Milton occurred in it.

The zeal of the Liberal party in the propagation of the cult of Milton was of course encountered by an equal passion on the part of the Tory opposition. They were exasperated by the lustre which was reflected upon Revolution principles by the name of Milton. About the middle of the eighteenth century, when Whig popularity was already beginning to wane, a desperate attempt was made by a rising Tory pamphleteer to crush the new Liberal idol. Dr. Johnson, the most vigorous writer of the day, conspired with one William Lauder, a native of Scotland seeking fortune in London, to stamp out Milton's credit by proving him to be a wholesale plagiarist. Milton's imitations—he had gathered pearls wherever they were to be found—were thus to be turned into an indictment against him. One of the beauties of *Paradise Lost* is, as has been already said, the scholar's flavour of literary reminiscence which hangs about its words and images. This Virgilian art, in which Milton has surpassed his master, was represented by this pair of literary bandits as theft, and held

to prove at once moral obliquity and intellectual feebleness. This line of criticism was well chosen; it was, in fact, an appeal to the many from the few. Unluckily for the plot, Lauder was not satisfied with the amount of resemblance shown by real parallel passages. He ventured upon the bold step of forging verses, closely resembling lines in *Paradise Lost*, and ascribing these verses to older poets. He even forged verses which he quoted as if from *Paradise Lost*, and showed them as Milton's plagiarisms from preceding writers. Even these clumsy fictions might have passed without detection at that uncritical period of our literature, and under the shelter of the name of Samuel Johnson. But Lauder's impudence grew with the success of his criticisms, which he brought out as letters, through a series of years, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. There was a translation of *Paradise Lost* into Latin hexameters, which had been made in 1690 by William Hogg. Lauder inserted lines, taken from this translation, into passages taken from Massenius, Staphorstius, Taubmannus, neo-Latin poets, whom Milton had, or might have read, and presented these passages as thefts by Milton.

Low as learning had sunk in England in 1750, Hogg's Latin *Paradisus amissus* was just the book, which tutors of colleges who could teach Latin verses had often in their hands. Mr. Bowle, a tutor of Oriel College, Oxford, immediately recognised an old acquaintance in one or two of the interpolated lines. This put him upon the scent, he submitted Lauder's passages to a closer investigation, and the whole fraud was exposed. Johnson, who was not concerned in the cheat, and was only guilty of indolence and party spirit, saved himself by sacrificing his comrade. He afterwards took ample revenge for the mortification of this exposure, in his *Lives of the Poets*, in which he em-

ployed all his vigorous powers and consummate skill to write down Milton. He undoubtedly dealt a heavy blow at the poet's reputation, and succeeded in damaging it for at least two generations of readers. He did for Milton what Aristophanes did for Socrates, effaced the real man and replaced him by a distorted and degrading caricature.

It was again a clergyman to whom Milton owed his vindication from Lauder's onslaught. John Douglas, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, brought Bowle's materials before the public. But the high Anglican section of English life has never thoroughly accepted Milton. R. S. Hawker, vicar of Morwenstow, himself a poet of real feeling, gave expression, in rabid abuse of Milton, to the antipathy which more judicious churchmen suppress. Even the calm and gentle author of the *Christian Year*, wide heart ill-sorted with a narrow creed, deliberately framed a theory of Poetic for the express purpose, as it would seem, of excluding the author of *Paradise Lost* from the first class of poets.

But a work such as Milton has constructed, at once intense and elaborate, firmly knit and broadly laid, can afford to wait. Time is all in its favour, and against its detractors. The Church never forgives, and faction does not die out. But Milton has been, for two centuries, getting beyond the reach of party feeling, whether of friends or foes. In each national aggregate an instinct is always at work, an instinct not equal to exact discrimination of lesser degrees of merit, but surely finding out the chief forces which have found expression in the native tongue. This instinct is not an active faculty, and so exposed to the influences which warp the will, it is a passive deposition from unconscious impression. Our appreciation of our poet is not to be measured by our choosing him for our

favourite closet companion, or reading him often. As Voltaire wittily said of Dante, "Sa reputation s'affirmera toujours, parce qu'on ne le lit guère." We shall prefer to read the fashionable novelist of each season as it passes, but we shall choose to be represented at the international congress of world poets by Shakespeare and Milton; Shakespeare first, and next MILTON.

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GOLDSMITH

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"INNOCENTLY to amuse the imagination in this dream of life is wisdom." So wrote Oliver Goldsmith; and surely among those who have earned the world's gratitude by this ministration he must be accorded a conspicuous place. If, in these delightful writings of his, he mostly avoids the darker problems of existence—if the mystery of the tragic and apparently unmerited and unrequited suffering in the world is rarely touched upon—we can pardon the omission for the sake of the gentle optimism that would rather look on the kindly side of life. "You come hot and tired from the day's battle, and this sweet minstrel sings to you," says Mr. Thackeray. "Who could harm the kind vagrant harper? Whom did he ever hurt? He carries no weapon save the harp on which he plays to you; and with which he delights great and humble, young and old, the captains in the tents, or the soldiers round the

fire, or the women and children in the villages, at whose porches he stops and sings his simple songs of love and beauty." And it is to be suspected—it is to be hoped, at least—that the cheerfulness which shines like sunlight through Goldsmith's writings, did not altogether desert himself even in the most trying hours of his wayward and troubled career. He had, with all his sensitiveness, a fine happy-go-lucky disposition; was ready for a frolic when he had a guinea, and, when he had none, could turn a sentence on the humorous side of starvation; and certainly never attributed to the injustice or neglect of society misfortunes the origin of which lay nearer home.

Of course, a very dark picture might be drawn of Goldsmith's life; and the sufferings that he undoubtedly endured have been made a whip with which to lash the ingratitude of a world not too quick to recognise the claims of genius. He has been put before us, without any brighter lights to the picture, as the most unfortunate of poor devils; the heart-broken usher; the hack ground down by sordid booksellers; the starving occupant of successive garrets. This is the aspect of Goldsmith's career which naturally attracts Mr. Forster. Mr. Forster seems to have been haunted throughout his life by the idea that Providence had some especial spite against literary persons; and that, in a measure to compensate them for their sad lot, society should be very kind to them, while the Government of the day might make them Companions of the Bath or give them posts in the Civil Service. In the otherwise copious, thorough, and valuable *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, we find an almost humiliating insistance on the complaint that

Oliver Goldsmith did not receive greater recognition and larger sums of money from his contemporaries. Goldsmith is here "the poor neglected sizar"; his "marked ill-fortune" attends him constantly; he shares "the evil destinies of men of letters"; he was one of those who "struggled into fame without the aid of English institutions"; in short, "he wrote, and paid the penalty." Nay, even Christianity itself is impeached on account of the persecution suffered by poor Goldsmith. "There had been a Christian religion extant for seventeen-hundred and fifty-seven years," writes Mr. Forster, "the world having been acquainted, for even so long, with its spiritual necessities and responsibilities; yet here, in the middle of the eighteenth century, was the eminence ordinarily conceded to a spiritual teacher, to one of those men who come upon the earth to lift their fellow-men above its miry ways. He is up in a garret, writing for bread he cannot get, and dunned for a milk-score he cannot pay." That Christianity might have been worse employed than in paying the milkman's score is true enough, for then the milkman would have come by his own; but that Christianity, or the state, or society should be scolded because an author suffers the natural consequences of his allowing his expenditure to exceed his income, seems a little hard. And this is a sort of writing that is peculiarly inappropriate in the case of Goldsmith, who, if ever any man was author of his own misfortunes, may fairly have the charge brought against him. "Men of genius," says Mr. Forster, "can more easily starve, than the world, with safety to itself, can continue to neglect and starve them." Perhaps so; but the English nation, which

has always had a regard and even love for Oliver Goldsmith, that is quite peculiar in the history of literature, and which has been glad to overlook his faults and follies, and eager to sympathise with him in the many miseries of his career, will be slow to believe that it is responsible for any starvation that Goldsmith may have endured.

However, the key-note has been firmly struck, and it still vibrates. Goldsmith was the unluckiest of mortals, the hapless victim of circumstances. "Yielding to that united pressure of labour, penury, and sorrow, with a frame exhausted by unremitting and ill-rewarded drudgery, Goldsmith was indebted to the forbearance of creditors for a peaceful burial." But what, now, if some foreigner strange to the traditions of English literature—some Japanese student, for example, or the New Zealander come before his time—were to go over the ascertained facts of Goldsmith's life, and were suddenly to announce to us, with the happy audacity of ignorance, that he, Goldsmith, was a quite exceptionally fortunate person? "Why," he might say, "I find that in a country where the vast majority of people are born to labour, Oliver Goldsmith was never asked to do a stroke of work towards the earning of his own living until he had arrived at man's estate. All that was expected of him, as a youth and as a young man, was that he should equip himself fully for the battle of life. He was maintained at college until he had taken his degree. Again and again he was furnished with funds for further study and foreign travel; and again and again he gambled his opportunities away. The constant kindness of his uncle only made him the best

begging-letter-writer the world has seen. In the midst of his debt and distress as a bookseller's drudge, he receives £400 for three nights' performance of *The Good-Natured Man*; he immediately purchases chambers in Brick Court for £400; and forthwith begins to borrow as before. It is true that he died owing £2000, and was indebted to the forbearance of creditors for a peaceful burial; but it appears that during the last seven years of his life he had been earning an annual income equivalent to £800 of English currency.[1] He was a man liberally and affectionately brought up, who had many relatives and many friends, and who had the proud satisfaction—which has been denied to many men of genius—of knowing for years before he died that his merits as a writer had been recognised by the great bulk of his countrymen. And yet this strange English nation is inclined to suspect that it treated him rather badly; and Christianity is attacked because it did not pay Goldsmith's milkscore."

Our Japanese friend may be exaggerating; but his position is after all fairly tenable. It may at least be looked at, before entering on the following brief *résumé* of the leading facts in Goldsmith's life, if only to restore our equanimity. For, naturally, it is not pleasant to think that any previous generation, however neglectful of the claims of literary persons (as compared with the claims of such wretched creatures as physicians, men of science, artists, engineers, and so

[1] The calculation is Lord Macaulay's: see his *Biographical Essays.*

forth) should so cruelly have ill-treated one whom we all love now. This inheritance of ingratitude is more than we can bear. Is it true that Goldsmith was so harshly dealt with by those barbarian ancestors of ours?

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

The Goldsmiths were of English descent; Goldsmith's father was a Protestant clergyman in a poor little village in the county of Longford; and when Oliver, one of several children, was born in this village of Pallas, or Pallasmore, on the 10th November, 1728, the Rev. Charles Goldsmith was passing rich on £40 a year. But a couple of years later Mr. Goldsmith succeeded to a more lucrative living; and forthwith removed his family to the village of Lissoy, in the county of Westmeath.

Here at once our interest in the story begins: is this Lissoy the sweet Auburn that we have known and loved since our childhood? Lord Macaulay, with a great deal of vehemence, avers that it is not; that there never was any such hamlet as Auburn in Ireland; that *The Deserted Village* is a hopelessly incongruous poem; and that Goldsmith, in combining a description of a probably Kentish village with a description of an Irish ejectment, "has produced something which never was, and never will be, seen in any part of the world." This criticism is ingenious and plausible, but it is unsound, for it happens to overlook one of

the radical facts of human nature—the magnifying delight of the mind in what is long remembered and remote. What was it that the imagination of Goldsmith, in his life-long banishment, could not see when he looked back to the home of his childhood, and his early friends, and the sports and occupations of his youth? Lissoy was no doubt a poor enough Irish village; and perhaps the farms were not too well cultivated; and perhaps the village preacher, who was so dear to all the country round, had to administer many a thrashing to a certain graceless son of his; and perhaps Paddy Byrne was something of a pedant; and no doubt pigs ran over the "nicely sanded floor" of the inn; and no doubt the village statesmen occasionally indulged in a free fight. But do you think that was the Lissoy that Goldsmith thought of in his dreary lodgings in Fleet-Street courts? No. It was the Lissoy where the vagrant lad had first seen the "primrose peep beneath the thorn"; where he had listened to the mysterious call of the bittern by the unfrequented river; it was a Lissoy still ringing with the glad laughter of young people in the twilight hours; it was a Lissoy for ever beautiful, and tender, and far away. The grown-up Goldsmith had not to go to any Kentish village for a model; the familiar scenes of his youth, regarded with all the wistfulness and longing of an exile, became glorified enough. "If I go to the opera where Signora Colomba pours out all the mazes of melody," he writes to Mr. Hodson, "I sit and sigh for Lissoy's fire-side, and *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night* from Peggy Golden."

There was but little in the circumstances of Gold-

smith's early life likely to fit him for, or to lead him into, a literary career; in fact, he did not take to literature until he had tried pretty nearly everything else as a method of earning a living. If he was intended for anything, it was no doubt his father's wish that he should enter the Church; and he got such education as the poor Irish clergyman—who was not a very provident person—could afford. The child Goldsmith was first of all taught his alphabet at home, by a maid-servant, who was also a relation of the family; then, at the age of six, he was sent to that village school which, with its profound and learned master, he has made familiar to all of us; and after that he was sent further a-field for his learning, being moved from this to the other boarding-school as the occasion demanded. Goldsmith's school-life could not have been altogether a pleasant time for him. We hear, indeed, of his being concerned in a good many frolics—robbing orchards, and the like; and it is said that he attained proficiency in the game of fives. But a shy and sensitive lad like Goldsmith, who was eagerly desirous of being thought well of, and whose appearance only invited the thoughtless but cruel ridicule of his schoolmates, must have suffered a good deal. He was little, pitted with the small-pox, and awkward; and schoolboys are amazingly frank. He was not strong enough to thrash them into respect of him; he had no big brother to become his champion; his pocket-money was not lavish enough to enable him to buy over enemies or subsidise allies.

In similar circumstances it has sometimes happened that a boy physically inferior to his companions has

consoled himself by proving his mental prowess—has scored off his failure at cricket by the taking of prizes, and has revenged himself for a drubbing by writing a lampoon. But even this last resource was not open to Goldsmith. He was a dull boy; "a stupid, heavy blockhead," is Dr. Strean's phrase in summing up the estimate formed of young Goldsmith by his contemporaries at school. Of course, as soon as he became famous, everybody began to hunt up recollections of his having said or done this or that, in order to prove that there were signs of the coming greatness. People began to remember that he had been suspected of scribbling verses, which he burned. What schoolboy has not done the like? We know how the biographers of great painters point out to us that their hero early showed the bent of his mind by drawing the figures of animals on doors and walls with a piece of chalk; as to which it may be observed that, if every schoolboy who scribbled verses and sketched in chalk on a brick wall, were to grow up a genius, poems and pictures would be plentiful enough. However, there is the apparently authenticated anecdote of young Goldsmith's turning the tables on the fiddler at his uncle's dancing-party. The fiddler, struck by the odd look of the boy who was capering about the room, called out "Æsop!" whereupon Goldsmith is said to have instantly replied,

> "Our herald hath proclaimed this saying,
> See Æsop dancing and his monkey playing!"

But even if this story be true, it is worth nothing as an augury; for quickness of repartee was precisely the accomplishment which the adult Goldsmith conspicuously

lacked. Put a pen into his hand, and shut him up in a room: then he was master of the situation—nothing could be more incisive, polished, and easy than his playful sarcasm. But in society any fool could get the better of him by a sudden question followed by a horse-laugh. All through his life—even after he had become one of the most famous of living writers—Goldsmith suffered from want of self-confidence. He was too anxious to please. In his eager acquiescence, he would blunder into any trap that was laid for him. A grain or two of the stolid self-sufficiency of the blockheads who laughed at him would not only have improved his character, but would have considerably added to the happiness of his life.

As a natural consequence of this timidity, Goldsmith, when opportunity served, assumed airs of magnificent importance. Every one knows the story of the mistake on which *She Stoops to Conquer* is founded. Getting free at last from all the turmoil, and anxieties, and mortifications of school-life, and returning home on a lent hack, the released schoolboy is feeling very grand indeed. He is now sixteen, would fain pass for a man, and has a whole golden guinea in his pocket. And so he takes the journey very leisurely until, getting benighted in a certain village, he asks the way to the "best house," and is directed by a facetious person to the house of the squire. The squire by good luck falls in with the joke; and then we have a very pretty comedy indeed—the impecunious schoolboy playing the part of a fine gentleman on the strength of his solitary guinea, ordering a bottle of wine after his supper, and inviting his landlord and his landlord's wife and daughter

to join him in the supper-room. The contrast, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, between Marlow's embarrassed diffidence on certain occasions and his audacious effrontery on others, found many a parallel in the incidents of Goldsmith's own life; and it is not improbable that the writer of the comedy was thinking of some of his own experiences, when he made Miss Hardcastle say to her timid suitor: "A want of courage upon some occasions assumes the appearance of ignorance, and betrays us when we most want to excel."

It was, perhaps, just as well that the supper, and bottle of wine, and lodging at Squire Featherston's had not to be paid for out of the schoolboy's guinea; for young Goldsmith was now on his way to college, and the funds at the disposal of the Goldsmith family were not over abundant. Goldsmith's sister having married the son of a well-to-do man, her father considered it a point of honour that she should have a dowry: and in giving her a sum of £400 he so crippled the means of the family, that Goldsmith had to be sent to college not as a pensioner but as a sizar. It appears that the young gentleman's pride revolted against this proposal; and that he was won over to consent only by the persuasions of his uncle Contarine, who himself had been a sizar. So Goldsmith, now in his eighteenth year, went to Dublin; managed somehow or other—though he was the last in the list—to pass the necessary examination; and entered upon his college career (1745.)

How he lived, and what he learned, at Trinity College, are both largely matters of conjecture; the chief features of such record as we have are the various means of raising a little money to which the poor

sizar had to resort; a continual quarrelling with his tutor, an ill-conditioned brute, who baited Goldsmith and occasionally beat him; and a chance frolic when funds were forthcoming. It was while he was at Trinity College that his father died; so that Goldsmith was rendered more than ever dependent on the kindness of his uncle Contarine, who throughout seems to have taken much interest in his odd, ungainly nephew. A loan from a friend or a visit to the pawnbroker tided over the severer difficulties; and then from time to time the writing of street-ballads, for which he got five shillings a-piece at a certain repository, came in to help. It was a happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth sort of existence, involving a good deal of hardship and humiliation, but having its frolics and gaieties notwithstanding. One of these was pretty near to putting an end to his collegiate career altogether. He had, smarting under a public admonition for having been concerned in a riot, taken seriously to his studies and had competed for a scholarship. He missed the scholarship, but gained an exhibition of the value of thirty shillings; whereupon he collected a number of friends of both sexes in his rooms, and proceeded to have high jinks there. In the midst of the dancing and uproar, in comes his tutor, in such a passion that he knocks Goldsmith down. This insult, received before his friends, was too much for the unlucky sizar, who, the very next day, sold his books, ran away from college, and ultimately, after having been on the verge of starvation once or twice, made his way to Lissoy. Here his brother got hold of him; persuaded him to go back; and the escapade was condoned somehow,

Goldsmith remained at Trinity College until he took his degree (1749.) He was again lowest in the list; but still he had passed; and he must have learned something. He was now twenty-one, with all the world before him; and the question was as to how he was to employ such knowledge as he had acquired.

CHAPTER III.

IDLENESS, AND FOREIGN TRAVEL.

But Goldsmith was not in any hurry to acquire either wealth or fame. He had a happy knack of enjoying the present hour—especially when there were one or two boon companions with him, and a pack of cards to be found; and, after his return to his mother's house, he appears to have entered upon the business of idleness with much philosophical satisfaction. If he was not quite such an unlettered clown as he has described in Tony Lumpkin, he had at least all Tony Lumpkin's high spirits and love of joking and idling; and he was surrounded at the ale-house by just such a company of admirers as used to meet at the famous Three Pigeons. Sometimes he helped in his brother's school; sometimes he went errands for his mother; occasionally he would sit and meditatively play the flute—for the day was to be passed somehow; then in the evening came the assemblage in Conway's inn, with the glass, and the pipe, and the cards, and the uproarious jest or song. "But Scripture saith an ending to all fine things must be," and the friends of this jovial young "buckeen" began to tire of his idleness and his

recurrent visits. They gave him hints that he might set about doing something to provide himself with a living; and the first thing they thought of was that he should go into the Church—perhaps as a sort of purification-house after George Conway's inn. Accordingly Goldsmith, who appears to have been a most good-natured and compliant youth, did make application to the Bishop of Elphin. There is some doubt about the precise reasons which induced the Bishop to decline Goldsmith's application, but at any rate the Church was denied the aid of the young man's eloquence and erudition. Then he tried teaching, and through the good offices of his uncle he obtained a tutorship which he held for a considerable time—long enough, indeed, to enable him to amass a sum of thirty pounds. When he quarrelled with his patron, and once more "took the world for his pillow," as the Gaelic stories say, he had this sum in his pocket and was possessed of a good horse.

He started away from Ballymahon, where his mother was now living, with some vague notion of making his fortune as casual circumstance might direct. The expedition came to a premature end; and he returned without the money, and on the back of a wretched animal, telling his mother a cock-and-bull story of the most amusing simplicity. "If Uncle Contarine believed those letters," says Mr. Thackeray, "—— if Oliver's mother believed that story which the youth related of his going to Cork, with the purpose of embarking for America; of his having paid his passage-money, and having sent his kit on board; of the anonymous captain sailing away with Oliver's valuable

luggage, in a nameless ship, never to return; if Uncle Contarine and the mother at Ballymahon believed his stories, they must have been a very simple pair; as it was a very simple rogue indeed who cheated them." Indeed, if any one is anxious to fill up this hiatus in Goldsmith's life, the best thing he can do is to discard Goldsmith's suspicious record of his adventures, and put in its place the faithful record of the adventures of Mr. Barry Lyndon, when that modest youth left his mother's house and rode to Dublin, with a certain number of guineas in his pocket. But whether Uncle Contarine believed the story or no, he was ready to give the young gentleman another chance; and this time it was the legal profession that was chosen. Goldsmith got fifty pounds from his uncle, and reached Dublin. In a remarkably brief space of time he had gambled away the fifty pounds, and was on his way back to Ballymahon, where his mother's reception of him was not very cordial, though his uncle forgave him, and was once more ready to start him in life. But in what direction? Teaching, the Church, and the law had lost their attractions for him. Well, this time it was medicine. In fact, any sort of project was capable of drawing forth the good old uncle's bounty. The funds were again forthcoming; Goldsmith started for Edinburgh, and now (1752) saw Ireland for the last time.

He lived, and he informed his uncle that he studied, in Edinburgh for a year and a half; at the end of which time it appeared to him that his knowledge of medicine would be much improved by foreign travel. There was Albinus, for example, "the great professor of Leyden," as he wrote to the credulous uncle, from

whom he would doubtless learn much. When, having got another twenty pounds for travelling expenses, he did reach Leyden (1754), he mentioned Gaubius, the chemical professor. Gaubius is also a good name. That his intercourse with these learned persons, and the serious nature of his studies, were not incompatible with a little light relaxation in the way of gambling is not impossible. On one occasion, it is said, he was so lucky that he came to a fellow student with his pockets full of money; and was induced to resolve never to play again—a resolution broken about as soon as made. Of course he lost all his winnings, and more; and had to borrow a trifling sum to get himself out of the place. Then an incident occurs which is highly characteristic of the better side of Goldsmith's nature. He had just got this money, and was about to leave Leyden, when, as Mr. Forster writes, "he passed a florist's garden on his return, and seeing some rare and high-priced flower, which his uncle Contarine, an enthusiast in such things, had often spoken and been in search of, he ran in without other thought than of immediate pleasure to his kindest friend, bought a parcel of the roots, and sent them off to Ireland." He had a guinea in his pocket when he started on the grand tour.

Of this notable period in Goldsmith's life (1755–6) very little is known, though a good deal has been guessed. A minute record of all the personal adventures that befell the wayfarer as he trudged from country to country, a diary of the odd humours and fancies that must have occurred to him in his solitary pilgrimages, would be of quite inestimable value; but even the letters that Goldsmith wrote home from time to time are lost; while *The*

Traveller consists chiefly of a series of philosophical reflections on the government of various states, more likely to have engaged the attention of a Fleet-street author, living in an atmosphere of books, than to have occupied the mind of a tramp anxious about his supper and his night's lodging. Boswell says he "disputed" his way through Europe. It is much more probable that he begged his way through Europe. The romantic version, which has been made the subject of many a charming picture, is that he was entertained by the peasantry whom he had delighted with his playing on the flute. It is quite probable that Goldsmith, whose imagination had been captivated by the story of how Baron von Holberg had as a young man really passed through France, Germany, and Holland in this Orpheus-like manner, may have put a flute in his pocket when he left Leyden; but it is far from safe to assume, as is generally done, that Goldsmith was himself the hero of the adventures described in Chapter xx. of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. It is the more to be regretted that we have no authentic record of these devious wanderings, that by this time Goldsmith had acquired, as is shown in other letters, a polished, easy, and graceful style, with a very considerable faculty of humorous observation. Those ingenious letters to his uncle (they usually included a little hint about money) were, in fact, a trifle too literary both in substance and in form; we could even now, looking at them with a pardonable curiosity, have spared a little of their formal antithesis for some more precise information about the writer and his surroundings.

The strangest thing about this strange journey all over

Europe was the failure of Goldsmith to pick up even a common and ordinary acquaintance with the familiar facts of natural history. The ignorance on this point of the author of the *Animated Nature* was a constant subject of jest among Goldsmith's friends. They declared he could not tell the difference between any two sorts of barndoor fowl until he saw them cooked and on the table. But it may be said prematurely here that, even when he is wrong as to his facts or his sweeping generalisations, one is inclined to forgive him on account of the quaint gracefulness and point of his style. When Mr. Burchell says, "This rule seems to extend even to other animals: the little vermin race are ever treacherous, cruel, and cowardly, whilst those endowed with strength and power are generous, brave, and gentle," we scarcely stop to reflect that the merlin, which is not much bigger than a thrush, has an extraordinary courage and spirit, while the lion, if all stories be true, is, unless when goaded by hunger, an abject skulker. Elsewhere, indeed, in the *Animated Nature*, Goldsmith gives credit to the smaller birds for a good deal of valour, and then goes on to say, with a charming freedom,—"But their contentions are sometimes of a gentler nature. Two male birds shall strive in song till, after a long struggle, the loudest shall entirely silence the other. During these contentions the female sits an attentive silent auditor, and often rewards the loudest songster with her company during the season." Yet even this description of the battle of the bards, with the queen of love as arbiter, is scarcely so amusing as his happy-go-lucky notions with regard to the variability of species. The philosopher, flute in hand, who went

wandering from the canals of Holland to the ice-ribbed falls of the Rhine, may have heard from time to time that contest between singing-birds which he so imaginatively describes; but it was clearly the Fleet-Street author, living among books, who arrived at the conclusion that intermarriage of species is common among small birds and rare among big birds. Quoting some lines of Addison's which express the belief that birds are a virtuous race—that the nightingale, for example, does not covet the wife of his neighbour, the blackbird—Goldsmith goes on to observe,—"But whatever may be the poet's opinion, the probability is against this fidelity among the smaller tenants of the grove. The great birds are much more true to their species than these; and, of consequence, the varieties among them are more few. Of the ostrich, the cassowary, and the eagle, there are but few species; and no arts that man can use could probably induce them to mix with each other."

What he did bring back from his foreign travels was a medical degree. Where he got it, and how he got it, are alike matters of pure conjecture; but it is extremely improbable that—whatever he might have been willing to write home from Padua or Louvain, in order to coax another remittance from his Irish friends—he would afterwards, in the presence of such men as Johnson, Burke, and Reynolds, wear sham honours. It is much more probable that, on his finding those supplies from Ireland running ominously short, the philosophic vagabond determined to prove to his correspondents that he was really at work somewhere, instead of merely idling away his time, begging or

borrowing the wherewithal to pass him from town to town. That he did see something of the foreign universities is evident from his own writings; there are touches of description here and there which he could not well have got from books. With this degree, and with such book-learning and such knowledge of nature and human nature as he had chosen or managed to pick up during all those years, he was now called upon to begin life for himself. The Irish supplies stopped altogether. His letters were left unanswered. And so Goldsmith somehow or other got back to London (February 1, 1756), and had to cast about for some way of earning his daily bread.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY STRUGGLES.—HACK-WRITING.

HERE ensued a very dark period in his life. He was alone in London, without friends, without money, without introductions; his appearance was the reverse of prepossessing; and, even despite that medical degree and his acquaintance with the learned Albinus and the learned Gaubius, he had practically nothing of any value to offer for sale in the great labour-market of the world. How he managed to live at all is a mystery: it is certain that he must have endured a great deal of want; and one may well sympathise with so gentle and sensitive a creature reduced to such straits, without inquiring too curiously into the causes of his misfortunes. If, on the one hand, we cannot accuse society, or Christianity, or the English government of injustice and cruelty because Goldsmith had gambled away his chances and was now called on to pay the penalty, on the other hand, we had better, before blaming Goldsmith himself, inquire into the origin of those defects of character which produced such results. As this would involve an *excursus* into the controversy between Necessity and Free-will, probably most people would rather leave it alone. It may

safely be said in any case that, while Goldsmith's faults and follies, of which he himself had to suffer the consequences, are patent enough, his character on the whole was distinctly a lovable one. Goldsmith was his own enemy, and everybody else's friend: that is not a serious indictment, as things go. He was quite well aware of his weaknesses; and he was also—it may be hinted—aware of the good-nature which he put forward as condonation. If some foreigner were to ask how it is that so thoroughly a commercial people as the English are—strict in the acknowledgment and payment of debt—should have always betrayed a sneaking fondness for the character of the good-humoured scapegrace whose hand is in everybody's pocket, and who throws away other people's money with the most charming air in the world, Goldsmith might be pointed to as one of many literary teachers whose own circumstances were not likely to make them severe censors of the Charles Surfaces, or lenient judges of the Joseph Surfaces of the world. Be merry while you may; let to-morrow take care of itself; share your last guinea with any one, even if the poor drones of society—the butcher, and baker, and milkman with his score—have to suffer; do anything you like, so long as you keep the heart warm. All this is a delightful philosophy. It has its moments of misery—its periods of reaction—but it has its moments of high delight. When we are invited to contemplate the "evil destinies of men of letters," we ought to be shown the flood-tides as well as the ebb-tides. The tavern gaiety; the brand new coat and lace and sword; the midnight frolics, with jolly companions every one—these, however brief and inter-

mittent, should not be wholly left out of the picture. Of course it is very dreadful to hear of poor Boyse lying in bed with nothing but a blanket over him, and with his arms thrust through two holes in the blanket, so that he could write—perhaps a continuation of his poem on the *Deity*. But then we should be shown Boyse when he was spending the money collected by Dr. Johnson to get the poor scribbler's clothes out of pawn; and we should also be shown him, with his hands through the holes in the blanket, enjoying the mushrooms and truffles on which, as a little garniture for "his last scrap of beef," he had just laid out his last half-guinea.

There were but few truffles—probably there was but little beef—for Goldsmith during this sombre period. "His threadbare coat, his uncouth figure, and Hibernian dialect caused him to meet with repeated refusals." But at length he got some employment in a chemist's shop, and this was a start. Then he tried practising in a small way on his own account in Southwark. Here he made the acquaintance of a printer's workman; and through him he was engaged as corrector of the press in the establishment of Mr. Samuel Richardson. Being so near to literature, he caught the infection; and naturally began with a tragedy. This tragedy was shown to the author of *Clarissa Harlowe;* but it only went the way of many similar first inspiritings of the Muse. Then Goldsmith drifted to Peckham, where we find him (1757) installed as usher at Dr. Milner's school. Goldsmith as usher has been the object of much sympathy; and he would certainly deserve it, if we are to assume that his description of an usher's position in the *Bee*, and in George Primrose's advice to his cousin, was a full and

accurate description of his life at Peckham. "Browbeat by the master, hated for my ugly face by the mistress, worried by the boys"—if that was his life, he was much to be pitied. But we cannot believe it. The Milners were exceedingly kind to Goldsmith. It was at the intercession of young Milner, who had been his fellow-student at Edinburgh, that Goldsmith got the situation, which at all events kept him out of the reach of immediate want. It was through the Milners that he was introduced to Griffiths, who gave him a chance of trying a literary career—as a hack-writer of reviews and so forth. When, having got tired of that, Goldsmith was again floating vaguely on the waves of chance, where did he find a harbour but in that very school at Peckham? And we have the direct testimony of the youngest of Dr. Milner's daughters, that this Irish usher of theirs was a remarkably cheerful, and even facetious person, constantly playing tricks and practical jokes, amusing the boys by telling stories and by performances on the flute, living a careless life, and always in advance of his salary. Any beggars, or group of children, even the very boys who played back practical jokes on him, were welcome to a share of what small funds he had; and we all know how Mrs. Milner good-naturedly said one day, "You had better, Mr. Goldsmith, let me keep your money for you, as I do for some of the young gentlemen;" and how he answered with much simplicity, "In truth, Madam, there is equal need." With Goldsmith's love of approbation and extreme sensitiveness he no doubt suffered deeply from many slights, now as at other times; but what we know of his life in the Peckham school does not incline us to

believe that it was an especially miserable period of his existence. His abundant cheerfulness does not seem to have at any time deserted him ; and what with tricks, and jokes, and playing of the flute, the dull routine of instructing the unruly young gentlemen at Dr. Milner's was got through somehow.

When Goldsmith left the Peckham school to try hack-writing in Paternoster Row, he was going further to fare worse. Griffiths the bookseller, when he met Goldsmith at Dr. Milner's dinner-table and invited him to become a reviewer, was doing a service to the English nation for it was in this period of machine-work that Goldsmith discovered that happy faculty of literary expression that led to the composition of his masterpieces—but he was doing little immediate service to Goldsmith.

The newly-captured hack was boarded and lodged at Griffiths' house in Paternoster Row (1757); he was to have a small salary in consideration of remorselessly constant work ; and—what was the hardest condition of all—he was to have his writings revised by Mrs. Griffiths. Mr. Forster justly remarks that though at last Goldsmith had thus become a man-of-letters, he "had gratified no passion and attained no object of ambition." He had taken to literature, as so many others have done, merely as a last resource. And if it is true that literature at first treated Goldsmith harshly, made him work hard, and gave him comparatively little for what he did, at least it must be said that his experience was not a singular one. Mr. Forster says that literature was at that time in a transition state : "The patron was gone, and the public had not come." But when Goldsmith began to do better than hack-work, he found a public

speedily enough. If, as Lord Macaulay computes, Goldsmith received in the last seven years of his life what was equivalent to £5,600 of our money, even the villain booksellers cannot be accused of having starved him. At the outset of his literary career he received no large sums, for he had achieved no reputation; but he got the market rate for his work. We have around us at this moment plenty of hacks who do not earn much more than their board and lodging with a small salary.

For the rest, we have no means of knowing whether Goldsmith got through his work with ease or with difficulty; but it is obvious, looking over the reviews which he is believed to have written for Griffiths' magazine, that he readily acquired the professional critic's airs of superiority, along with a few tricks of the trade, no doubt taught him by Griffiths. Several of these reviews, for example, are merely epitomes of the contents of the books reviewed, with some vague suggestion that the writer might, if he had been less careful, have done worse, and, if he had been more careful, might have done better. Who does not remember how the philosophic vagabond was taught to become a cognoscento? "The whole secret consisted in a strict adherence to two rules: the one always to observe that the picture might have been better if the painter had taken more pains; and the other to praise the works of Pietro Perugino." It is amusing to observe the different estimates formed of the function of criticism by Goldsmith the critic, and by Goldsmith the author. Goldsmith, sitting at Griffiths' desk, naturally magnifies his office, and announces his opinion that "to direct our taste, and conduct the poet up to perfection, has ever

been the true critic's province." But Goldsmith the author, when he comes to inquire into the existing state of Polite Learning in Europe, finds in criticism not a help but a danger. It is "the natural destroyer of polite learning." And again, in the *Citizen of the World*, he exclaims against the pretensions of the critic. "If any choose to be critics, it is but saying they are critics; and from that time forward they become invested with full power and authority over every caitiff who aims at their instruction or entertainment."

This at least may be said, that in these early essays contributed to the *Monthly Review* there is much more of Goldsmith the critic than of Goldsmith the author. They are somewhat laboured performances. They are almost devoid of the sly and delicate humour that afterwards marked Goldsmith's best prose work. We find throughout his trick of antithesis; but here it is forced and formal, whereas afterwards he lent to this habit of writing the subtle surprise of epigram. They have the true manner of authority, nevertheless. He says of Home's *Douglas*—"Those parts of nature, and that rural simplicity with which the author was, perhaps, best acquainted, are not unhappily described; and hence we are led to conjecture, that a more universal knowledge of nature will probably increase his powers of description." If the author had written otherwise, he would have written differently; had he known more, he would not have been so ignorant; the tragedy is a tragedy, but why did not the author make it a comedy? —this sort of criticism has been heard of even in our own day. However, Goldsmith pounded away at his newly-found work, under the eye of the exacting book-

seller and his learned wife. We find him dealing with Scandinavian (here called Celtic) mythology, though he does not adventure on much comment of his own; then he engages Smollett's *History of England*, but mostly in the way of extract; anon we find him reviewing *A Journal of Eight Days' Journey*, by Jonas Hanway, of whom Johnson said that he made some reputation by travelling abroad, and lost it all by travelling at home. Then again we find him writing a disquisition on *Some Enquiries concerning the First Inhabitants, Language, Religion, Learning, and Letters of Europe*, by a Mr. Wise, who, along with his critic, appears to have got into hopeless confusion in believing Basque and Armorican to be the remains of the same ancient language. The last phrase of a note appended to this review by Goldsmith probably indicates his own humble estimate of his work at this time. "It is more our business," he says, "to exhibit the opinions of the learned than to controvert them." In fact he was employed to boil down books for people who did not wish to spend more on literature than the price of a magazine. Though he was new to the trade, it is probable he did it as well as any other.

At the end of five months, Goldsmith and Griffiths quarrelled and separated. Griffiths said Goldsmith was idle; Goldsmith said Griffiths was impertinent; probably the editorial supervision exercised by Mrs. Griffiths had something to do with the dire contention. From Paternoster Row Goldsmith removed to a garret in Fleet Street; had his letters addressed to a coffee-house; and apparently supported himself by further hack-work, his connection with Griffiths not being quite severed. Then he drifted back to Peckham again; and was once more

installed as usher, Dr. Milner being in especial want of an assistant at this time. Goldsmith's lingering about the gates of literature had not inspired him with any great ambition to enter the enchanted land. But at the same time he thought he saw in literature a means by which a little ready money might be made, in order to help him on to something more definite and substantial; and this goal was now put before him by Dr. Milner, in the shape of a medical appointment on the Coromandel coast. It was in the hope of obtaining this appointment, that he set about composing that *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, which is now interesting to us as the first of his more ambitious works. As the book grew under his hands, he began to cast about for subscribers; and from the Fleet-Street coffee-house—he had again left the Peckham school—he addressed to his friends and relatives a series of letters of the most charming humour, which might have drawn subscriptions from a millstone. To his brother-in-law, Mr. Hodson, he sent a glowing account of the great fortune in store for him on the Coromandel coast. "The salary is but trifling," he writes, "namely £100 per annum, but the other advantages, if a person be prudent, are considerable. The practice of the place, if I am rightly informed, generally amounts to not less than £1,000 per annum, for which the appointed physician has an exclusive privilege. This, with the advantages resulting from trade, and the high interest which money bears, viz. £20 per cent., are the inducements which persuade me to undergo the fatigues of sea, the dangers of war, and the still greater dangers of the climate; which induce me to leave a place where I am every day

gaining friends and esteem, and where I might enjoy all the conveniences of life."

The surprising part of this episode in Goldsmith's life is that he did really receive the appointment; in fact he was called upon to pay £10 for the appointment-warrant. In this emergency he went to the proprietor of the *Critical Review*, the rival of the *Monthly*, and obtained some money for certain anonymous work which need not be mentioned in detail here. He also moved into another garret, this time in Green-Arbour Court, Fleet Street, in a wilderness of slums. The Coromandel project, however, on which so many hopes had been built, fell through. No explanation of the collapse could be got from either Goldsmith himself, or from Dr. Milner. Mr. Forster suggests that Goldsmith's inability to raise money for his outfit may have been made the excuse for transferring the appointment to another; and that is probable enough; but it is also probable that the need for such an excuse was based on the discovery that Goldsmith was not properly qualified for the post. And this seems the more likely, that Goldsmith immediately afterwards resolved to challenge examination at Surgeons' Hall. He undertook to write four articles for the *Monthly Review;* Griffiths became surety to a tailor for a fine suit of clothes; and thus equipped, Goldsmith presented himself at Surgeons' Hall. He only wanted to be passed as hospital mate; but even that modest ambition was unfulfilled. He was found not qualified; and returned, with his fine clothes, to his Fleet-Street den. He was now thirty years of age (1758); and had found no definite occupation in the world.

CHAPTER V.

BEGINNING OF AUTHORSHIP.—THE BEE.

During the period that now ensued, and amid much quarrelling with Griffiths and hack-writing for the *Critical Review*, Goldsmith managed to get his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* completed; and it is from the publication of that work, on the 2nd of April, 1759, that we may date the beginning of Goldsmith's career as an author. The book was published anonymously; but Goldsmith was not at all anxious to disclaim the parentage of his first-born; and in Grub Street and its environs, at least, the authorship of the book was no secret. Moreover there was that in it which was likely to provoke the literary tribe to plenty of fierce talking. The *Enquiry* is neither more nor less than an endeavour to prove that criticism has in all ages been the deadly enemy of art and literature; coupled with an appeal to authors to draw their inspiration from nature rather than from books, and varied here and there by a gentle sigh over the loss of that patronage, in the sunshine of which men of genius were wont to bask. Goldsmith, not having been an author himself, could not have suffered much at the

hands of the critics; so that it is not to be supposed that personal feeling dictated this fierce onslaught on the whole tribe of critics, compilers, and commentators. They are represented to us as rank weeds, growing up to choke all manifestations of true art. "Ancient learning," we are told at the outset, "may be distinguished into three periods: its commencement, or the age of poets; its maturity, or the age of philosophers; and its decline, or the age of critics." Then our guide carries us into the dark ages; and, with lantern in hand, shows us the creatures swarming there in the sluggish pools—"commentators, compilers, polemic divines, and intricate metaphysicians." We come to Italy: look at the affectations with which the Virtuosi and Filosofi have enchained the free spirit of poetry. "Poetry is no longer among them an imitation of what we see, but of what a visionary might wish. The zephyr breathes the most exquisite perfume; the trees wear eternal verdure; fawns, and dryads, and hamadryads, stand ready to fan the sultry shepherdess, who has forgot, indeed, the prettiness with which Guarini's shepherdesses have been reproached, but is so simple and innocent as often to have no meaning. Happy country, where the pastoral age begins to revive!—where the wits even of Rome are united into a rural group of nymphs and swains, under the appellation of modern Arcadians!—where in the midst of porticoes, processions, and cavalcades, abbés turned shepherds and shepherdesses without sheep indulge their innocent *divertimenti!*"

In Germany the ponderous volumes of the commentators next come in for animadversion; and here we

find an epigram, the quaint simplicity of which is peculiarly characteristic of Goldsmith. "Were angels to write books," he remarks, "they never would write folios." But Germany gets credit for the money spent by her potentates on learned institutions; and it is perhaps England that is delicately hinted at in these words: "Had the fourth part of the immense sum above-mentioned been given in proper rewards to genius, in some neighbouring countries, it would have rendered the name of the donor immortal, and added to the real interests of society." Indeed, when we come to England, we find that men of letters are in a bad way, owing to the prevalence of critics, the tyranny of booksellers, and the absence of patrons. "The author, when unpatronized by the great, has naturally recourse to the bookseller. There cannot perhaps be imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible. Accordingly, tedious compilations and periodical magazines are the result of their joint endeavours. In these circumstances the author bids adieu to fame, writes for bread, and for that only. Imagination is seldom called in. He sits down to address the venal muse with the most phlegmatic apathy; and, as we are told of the Russian, courts his mistress by falling asleep in her lap. His reputation never spreads in a wider circle than that of the trade, who generally value him, not for the fineness of his compositions, but the quantity he works off in a given time.

"A long habit of writing for bread thus turns the

ambition of every author at last into avarice. He finds that he has written many years, that the public are scarcely acquainted even with his name; he despairs of applause, and turns to profit, which invites him. He finds that money procures all those advantages, that respect, and that ease which he vainly expected from fame. Thus the man who, under the protection of the great, might have done honour to humanity, when only patronized by the bookseller, becomes a thing little superior to the fellow who works at the press."

Nor was he afraid to attack the critics of his own day, though he knew that the two Reviews for which he had recently been writing would have something to say about his own *Enquiry*. This is how he disposes of the *Critical* and the *Monthly*: "We have two literary Reviews in London, with critical newspapers and magazines without number. The compilers of these resemble the commoners of Rome; they are all for levelling property, not by increasing their own, but by diminishing that of others. The man who has any good-nature in his disposition must, however, be somewhat displeased to see distinguished reputations often the sport of ignorance,—to see, by one false pleasantry, the future peace of a worthy man's life disturbed, and this only because he has unsuccessfully attempted to instruct or amuse us. Though ill-nature is far from being wit, yet it is generally laughed at as such. The critic enjoys the triumph, and ascribes to his parts what is only due to his effrontery. I fire with indignation, when I see persons wholly destitute of education and genius indent to the press, and thus turn book-makers, adding to the sin of criticism the sin of ignorance also;

whose trade is a bad one, and who are bad workmen in the trade." Indeed there was a good deal of random hitting in the *Enquiry*, which was sure to provoke resentment. Why, for example, should he have gone out of his way to insult the highly respectable class of people who excel in mathematical studies? "This seems a science," he observes, "to which the meanest intellects are equal. I forget who it is that says 'All men might understand mathematics if they would.'" There was also in the first edition of the *Enquiry* a somewhat ungenerous attack on stage-managers, actors, actresses, and theatrical things in general; but this was afterwards wisely excised. It is not to be wondered at that, on the whole, the *Enquiry* should have been severely handled in certain quarters. Smollett, who reviewed it in the *Critical Review*, appears to have kept his temper pretty well for a Scotchman; but Kenrick, a hack employed by Griffiths to maltreat the book in the *Monthly Review*, flourished his bludgeon in a brave manner. The coarse personalities and malevolent insinuations of this bully no doubt hurt Goldsmith considerably; but, as we look at them now, they are only remarkable for their dulness. If Griffiths had had another Goldsmith to reply to Goldsmith, the retort would have been better worth reading: one can imagine the playful sarcasm that would have been dealt out to this new writer, who, in the very act of protesting against criticism, proclaimed himself a critic. But Goldsmiths are not always to be had when wanted; while Kenricks can be bought at any moment for a guinea or two a head.

Goldsmith had not chosen literature as the occupation

of his life; he had only fallen back on it, when other projects failed. But it is quite possible that now, as he began to take up some slight position as an author, the old ambition of distinguishing himself—which had flickered before his imagination from time to time—began to enter into his calculations along with the more pressing business of earning a livelihood. And he was soon to have an opportunity of appealing to a wider public than could have been expected for that erudite treatise on the arts of Europe. Mr. Wilkie, a bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard, proposed to start a weekly magazine, price threepence, to contain essays, short stories, letters on the topics of the day, and so forth, more or less after the manner of the *Spectator*. He asked Goldsmith to become sole contributor. Here, indeed, was a very good opening; for, although there were many magazines in the field, the public had just then a fancy for literature in small doses; while Goldsmith, in entering into the competition, would not be hampered by the dulness of collaborateurs. He closed with Wilkie's offer; and on the 6th of October, 1759, appeared the first number of the *Bee*.

For us now there is a curious autobiographical interest in the opening sentences of the first number; but surely even the public of the day must have imagined that the new writer who was now addressing them, was not to be confounded with the common herd of magazine-hacks. What could be more delightful than this odd mixture of modesty, humour, and an anxious desire to please?—"There is not, perhaps, a more whimsically dismal figure in nature than a man of real modesty, who assumes an air of impudence—who, while his heart beats with

anxiety, studies ease and affects good-humour. In this situation, however, a periodical writer often finds himself upon his first attempt to address the public in form. All his power of pleasing is damped by solicitude, and his cheerfulness dashed with apprehension. Impressed with the terrors of the tribunal before which he is going to appear, his natural humour turns to pertness, and for real wit he is obliged to substitute vivacity. His first publication draws a crowd; they part dissatisfied; and the author, never more to be indulged with a favourable hearing, is left to condemn the indelicacy of his own address or their want of discernment. For my part, as I was never distinguished for address, and have often even blundered in making my bow, such bodings as these had like to have totally repressed my ambition. I was at a loss whether to give the public specious promises, or give none; whether to be merry or sad on this solemn occasion. If I should decline all merit, it was too probable the hasty reader might have taken me at my word. If, on the other hand, like labourers in the magazine trade, I had, with modest impudence, humbly presumed to promise an epitome of all the good things that ever were said or written, this might have disgusted those readers I most desire to please. Had I been merry, I might have been censured as vastly low; and had I been sorrowful, I might have been left to mourn in solitude and silence; in short, whichever way I turned, nothing presented but prospects of terror, despair, chandlers' shops, and waste paper."

And it is just possible that if Goldsmith had kept to this vein of familiar *causerie*, the public might in time have been attracted by its quaintness. But no doubt

Mr Wilkie would have stared aghast; and so we find Goldsmith, as soon as his introductory bow is made, setting seriously about the business of magazine-making. Very soon, however, both Mr. Wilkie and his editor perceived that the public had not been taken by their venture. The chief cause of the failure, as it appears to any one who looks over the magazine now, would seem to be the lack of any definite purpose. There was no marked feature to arrest public attention, while many things were discarded on which the popularity of other periodicals had been based. There was no scandal to appeal to the key-hole and back-door element in human nature; there were no libels and gross personalities to delight the mean and envious; there were no fine airs of fashion to charm milliners anxious to know how the great talked, and posed, and dressed; and there was no solemn and pompous erudition to impress the minds of those serious and sensible people who buy literature as they buy butter, by its weight. At the beginning of No. IV. he admits that the new magazine has not been a success; and, in doing so, returns to that vein of whimsical, personal humour with which he had started: "Were I to measure the merit of my present undertaking by its success or the rapidity of its sale, I might be led to form conclusions by no means favourable to the pride of an author. Should I estimate my fame by its extent, every newspaper and magazine would leave me far behind. Their fame is diffused in a very wide circle—that of some as far as Islington, and some yet farther still; while mine, I sincerely believe, has hardly travelled beyond the sound of Bow Bell; and, while the works of others fly

like unpinioned swans, I find my own move as heavily as a new-plucked goose. Still, however, I have as much pride as they who have ten times as many readers. It is impossible to repeat all the agreeable delusions in which a disappointed author is apt to find comfort. I conclude, that what my reputation wants in extent is made up by its solidity. *Minus juvat gloria lata quam magna.* I have great satisfaction in considering the delicacy and discernment of those readers I have, and in ascribing my want of popularity to the ignorance or inattention of those I have not. All the world may forsake an author, but vanity will never forsake him. Yet, notwithstanding so sincere a confession, I was once induced to show my indignation against the public, by discontinuing my endeavours to please; and was bravely resolved, like Raleigh, to vex them by burning my manuscript in a passion. Upon recollection, however, I considered what set or body of people would be displeased at my rashness. The sun, after so sad an accident, might shine next morning as bright as usual; men might laugh and sing the next day, and transact business as before, and not a single creature feel any regret but myself."

Goldsmith was certainly more at home in this sort of writing, than in gravely lecturing people against the vice of gambling; in warning tradesmen how ill it became them to be seen at races; in demonstrating that justice is a higher virtue than generosity; and in proving that the avaricious are the true benefactors of society. But even as he confesses the failure of his new magazine, he seems determined to show the public what sort of writer this is, whom as yet they have

not regarded too favourably. It is in No. IV. of the *Bee* that the famous *City Night Piece* occurs. No doubt that strange little fragment of description was the result of some sudden and aimless fancy, striking the occupant of the lonely garret in the middle of the night. The present tense, which he seldom used—and the abuse of which is one of the detestable vices of modern literature—adds to the mysterious solemnity of the recital :—

"The clock has just struck two, the expiring taper rises and sinks in the socket, the watchman forgets the hour in slumber, the laborious and the happy are at rest, and nothing wakes but meditation, guilt, revelry, and despair. The drunkard once more fills the destroying bowl, the robber walks his midnight round, and the suicide lifts his guilty arm against his own sacred person.

"Let me no longer waste the night over the page of antiquity or the sallies of contemporary genius, but pursue the solitary walk, where Vanity, ever changing, but a few hours past walked before me—where she kept up the pageant, and now, like a froward child, seems hushed with her own importunities.

"What a gloom hangs all around! The dying lamp feebly emits a yellow gleam; no sound is heard but of the chiming clock, or the distant watch-dog. All the bustle of human pride is forgotten; an hour like this may well display the emptiness of human vanity.

"There will come a time, when this temporary solitude may be made continual, and the city itself, like its inhabitants, fade away, and leave a desert in its room.

"What cities, as great as this, have once triumphed in

existence, had their victories as great, joy as just and as unbounded; and, with short-sighted presumption, promised themselves immortality! Posterity can hardly trace the situation of some; the sorrowful traveller wanders over the awful ruins of others; and, as he beholds, he learns wisdom, and feels the transience of every sublunary possession.

"'Here,' he cries, 'stood their citadel, now grown over with weeds; there their senate-house, but now the haunt of every noxious reptile; temples and theatres stood here, now only an undistinguished heap of ruin. They are fallen, for luxury and avarice first made them feeble. The rewards of the state were conferred on amusing, and not on useful, members of society. Their riches and opulence invited the invaders, who, though at first repulsed, returned again, conquered by perseverance, and at last swept the defendants into undistinguished destruction.'"

CHAPTER VI.

PERSONAL TRAITS.

The foregoing extracts will sufficiently show what were the chief characteristics of Goldsmith's writing at this time—the grace and ease of style, a gentle and sometimes pathetic thoughtfulness, and, above all, when he speaks in the first person, a delightful vein of humorous self-disclosure. Moreover, these qualities, if they were not immediately profitable to the booksellers, were beginning to gain for him the recognition of some of the well-known men of the day. Percy, afterwards Bishop of Dromore, had made his way to the miserable garret of the poor author. Smollett, whose novels Goldsmith preferred to his History, was anxious to secure his services as a contributor to the forthcoming *British Magazine*. Burke had spoken of the pleasure given him by Goldsmith's review of the *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. But, to crown all, the great Cham himself sought out this obscure author, who had on several occasions spoken with reverence and admiration of his works; and so began what is perhaps the most interesting literary friendship on record. At what precise date Johnson first made Goldsmith's acquaintance, is not

known; Mr. Forster is right in assuming that they had met before the supper in Wine-Office Court, at which Mr. Percy was present. It is a thousand pities that Boswell had not by this time made his appearance in London. Johnson, Goldsmith, and all the rest of them are only ghosts until the pertinacious young laird of Auchinleck comes on the scene to give them colour, and life, and form. It is odd enough that the very first remarks of Goldsmith's which Boswell jotted down in his notebook, should refer to Johnson's systematic kindness towards the poor and wretched. "He had increased my admiration of the goodness of Johnson's heart by incidental remarks in the course of conversation, such as, when I mentioned Mr. Levett, whom he entertained under his roof, 'He is poor and honest, which is recommendation enough to Johnson'; and when I wondered that he was very kind to a man of whom I had heard a very bad character, 'He is now become miserable, and that ensures the protection of Johnson.'"

For the rest, Boswell was not well disposed towards Goldsmith, whom he regarded with a jealousy equal to his admiration of Johnson; but it is probable that his description of the personal appearance of the awkward and ungainly Irishman is in the main correct. And here also it may be said that Boswell's love of truth and accuracy compelled him to make this admission: "It has been generally circulated and believed that he (Goldsmith) was a mere fool in conversation; but, in truth, this has been greatly exaggerated." On this exaggeration—seeing that the contributor to the *British Magazine* and the *Public Ledger* was now becoming better

known among his fellow authors—a word or two may fitly be said here. It pleased Goldsmith's contemporaries, who were not all of them celebrated for their ready wit, to regard him as a hopeless and incurable fool, who by some strange chance could produce literature, the merits of which he could not himself understand. To Horace Walpole we owe the phrase which describes Goldsmith as an "inspired idiot." Innumerable stories are told of Goldsmith's blunders; of his forced attempts to shine in conversation; of poor Poll talking nonsense, when all the world was wondering at the beauty of his writing. In one case we are told he was content to admit, when dictated to, that this, and not that, was what he really had meant in a particular phrase. Now there can be no question that Goldsmith, conscious of his pitted face, his brogue, and his ungainly figure, was exceedingly nervous and sensitive in society, and was anxious, as such people mostly are, to cover his shyness by an appearance of ease, if not even of swagger; and there can be as little question that he occasionally did and said very awkward and blundering things. But our Japanese friend, whom we mentioned in our opening pages, looking through the record that is preserved to us of those blunders which are supposed to be most conclusive as to this aspect of Goldsmith's character, would certainly stare. "Good heavens," he would cry, "did men ever live who were so thick-headed as not to see the humour of this or that 'blunder'; or were they so beset with the notion that Goldsmith was only a fool, that they must needs be blind?" Take one well-known instance. He goes to France with Mrs. Horneck and her two

daughters, the latter very handsome young ladies. At Lille the two girls and Goldsmith are standing at the window of the hotel, overlooking the square in which are some soldiers; and naturally the beautiful young Englishwomen attract some attention. Thereupon Goldsmith turns indignantly away, remarking that elsewhere he also has his admirers. Now what surgical instrument was needed to get this harmless little joke into any sane person's head? Boswell may perhaps be pardoned for pretending to take the incident *au sérieux;* for as has just been said, in his profound adoration of Johnson, he was devoured by jealousy of Goldsmith; but that any other mortal should have failed to see what was meant by this little bit of humorous flattery is almost incredible. No wonder that one of the sisters afterwards referring to this "playful jest," should have expressed her astonishment at finding it put down as a proof of Goldsmith's envious disposition. But even after that disclaimer, we find Mr. Croker, as quoted by Mr. Forster, solemnly doubting "whether the vexation so seriously exhibited by Goldsmith was real or assumed"!

Of course this is an extreme case; but there are others very similar. "He affected," says Hawkins, "Johnson's style and manner of conversation, and, when he had uttered, as he often would, a laboured sentence, so tumid as to be scarce intelligible, would ask if that was not truly Johnsonian?" Is it not truly dismal to find such an utterance coming from a presumably reasonable human being? It is not to be wondered at that Goldsmith grew shy—and in some cases had to ward off the acquaintance of certain of his neighbours as being too intrusive—if he ran the risk of having his odd and grave

humours so densely mistranslated. The fact is this, that Goldsmith was possessed of a very subtle quality of humour, which is at all times rare, but which is perhaps more frequently to be found in Irishmen than among other folks. It consists in the satire of the pretence and pomposities of others by means of a sort of exaggerated and playful self-depreciation. It is a most delicate and most delightful form of humour; but it is very apt to be misconstrued by the dull. Who can doubt that Goldsmith was good-naturedly laughing at himself, his own plain face, his vanity, and his blunders, when he professed to be jealous of the admiration excited by the Miss Hornecks; when he gravely drew attention to the splendid colours of his coat; or when he no less gravely informed a company of his friends that he had heard a very good story, but would not repeat it, because they would be sure to miss the point of it?

This vein of playful and sarcastic self-depreciation is continually cropping up in his essay writing, as, for example, in the passage already quoted from No. IV. of the *Bee:* "I conclude, that what my reputation wants in extent, is made up by its solidity. *Minus juvat gloria lata quam magna.* I have great satisfaction in considering the delicacy and discernment of those readers I have, and in ascribing my want of popularity to the ignorance or inattention of those I have not." But here, no doubt, he remembers that he is addressing the world at large, which contains many foolish persons; and so, that the delicate raillery may not be mistaken, he immediately adds, "All the world may forsake an author, but vanity will never forsake

him." That he expected a quicker apprehension on the part of his intimates and acquaintances, and that he was frequently disappointed, seems pretty clear from those very stories of his "blunders." We may reasonably suspect, at all events, that Goldsmith was not quite so much of a fool as he looked; and it is far from improbable that when the ungainly Irishman was called in to make sport for the Philistines—and there were a good many Philistines in those days, if all stories be true—and when they imagined they had put him out of countenance, he was really standing aghast, and wondering how it could have pleased Providence to create such helpless stupidity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CITIZEN OF THE WORLD.—BEAU NASH.

MEANWHILE, to return to his literary work, the *Citizen of the World* had grown out of his contributions to the *Public Ledger*, a daily newspaper started by Mr. Newbery, another bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard. Goldsmith was engaged to write for this paper two letters a week at a guinea a-piece; and these letters were, after a short time (1760), written in the character of a Chinese who had come to study European civilisation. It may be noted that Goldsmith had in the *Monthly Review*, in mentioning Voltaire's memoirs of French writers, quoted a passage about Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* as follows: "It is written in imitation of the *Siamese Letters* of Du Freny and of the *Turkish Spy;* but it is an imitation which shows what the originals should have been. The success their works met with was, for the most part, owing to the foreign air of their performances; the success of the *Persian Letters* arose from the delicacy of their satire. That satire which in the mouth of an Asiatic is poignant, would lose all its force when coming from an European." And it must certainly be said that the charm of the

strictures of the *Citizen of the World* lies wholly in their delicate satire, and not at all in any foreign air which the author may have tried to lend to these performances. The disguise is very apparent. In those garrulous, vivacious, whimsical, and sometimes serious papers, Lien Chi Altangi, writing to Fum Hoam in Pekin, does not so much describe the aspects of European civilisation which would naturally surprise a Chinese, as he expresses the dissatisfaction of a European with certain phases of the civilisation visible everywhere around him. It is not a Chinaman, but a Fleet-Street author by profession, who resents the competition of noble amateurs whose works—otherwise bitter pills enough—are gilded by their titles :—"A nobleman has but to take a pen, ink, and paper, write away through three large volumes, and then sign his name to the title-page ; though the whole might have been before more disgusting than his own rent-roll, yet signing his name and title gives value to the deed, title being alone equivalent to taste, imagination, and genius. As soon as a piece, therefore, is published, the first questions are—Who is the author? Does he keep a coach? Where lies his estate? What sort of a table does he keep? If he happens to be poor and unqualified for such a scrutiny, he and his works sink into irremediable obscurity, and too late he finds, that having fed upon turtle is a more ready way to fame than having digested Tully. The poor devil against whom fashion has set its face vainly alleges that he has been bred in every part of Europe where knowledge was to be sold ; that he has grown pale in the study of nature and himself. His works may please upon the perusal, but his pretensions

to fame are entirely disregarded. He is treated like a fiddler, whose music, though liked, is not much praised, because he lives by it; while a gentleman performer, though the most wretched scraper alive, throws the audience into raptures. The fiddler, indeed, may in such a case console himself by thinking, that while the other goes off with all the praise, he runs away with all the money. But here the parallel drops; for while the nobleman triumphs in unmerited applause, the author by profession steals off with—nothing."

At the same time it must be allowed that the utterance of these strictures through the mouth of a Chinese admits of a certain *naïveté*, which on occasion heightens the sarcasm. Lien Chi accompanies the Man in Black to a theatre to see an English play. Here is part of the performance:—"I was going to second his remarks, when my attention was engrossed by a new object; a man came in balancing a straw upon his nose, and the audience were clapping their hands in all the raptures of applause. 'To what purpose,' cried I, 'does this unmeaning figure make his appearance? is he a part of the plot?'—'Unmeaning do you call him?' replied my friend in black; 'this is one of the most important characters of the whole play; nothing pleases the people more than seeing a straw balanced: there is a great deal of meaning in a straw: there is something suited to every apprehension in the sight; and a fellow possessed of talents like these is sure of making his fortune.' The third act now began with an actor who came to inform us that he was the villain of the play, and intended to show strange things before all was over. He was joined by another who seemed as much

disposed for mischief as he; their intrigues continued through this whole division. 'If that be a villain,' said I, 'he must be a very stupid one to tell his secrets without being asked; such soliloquies of late are never admitted in China.' The noise of clapping interrupted me once more; a child six years old was learning to dance on the stage, which gave the ladies and mandarins infinite satisfaction. 'I am sorry,' said I, 'to see the pretty creature so early learning so bad a trade; dancing being, I presume, as contemptible here as in China.'—'Quite the reverse,' interrupted my companion; 'dancing is a very reputable and genteel employment here; men have a greater chance for encouragement from the merit of their heels than their heads. One who jumps up and flourishes his toes three times before he comes to the ground may have three hundred a year: he who flourishes them four times, gets four hundred; but he who arrives at five is inestimable, and may demand what salary he thinks proper. The female dancers, too, are valued for this sort of jumping and crossing; and it is a cant word amongst them, that she deserves most who shows highest. But the fourth act is begun; let us be attentive.'"

The Man in Black here mentioned is one of the notable features of this series of papers. The mysterious person whose acquaintance the Chinaman made in Westminster Abbey, and who concealed such a wonderful goodness of heart under a rough and forbidding exterior, is a charming character indeed; and it is impossible to praise too highly the vein of subtle sarcasm in which he preaches worldly wisdom. But to assume that any part of his history which he disclosed

to the Chinaman was a piece of autobiographical writing on the part of Goldsmith, is a very hazardous thing. A writer of fiction must necessarily use such materials as have come within his own experience; and Goldsmith's experience—or his use of those materials—was extremely limited: witness how often a pet fancy, like his remembrance of *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night*, is repeated. "That of these simple elements," writes Professor Masson, in his *Memoir of Goldsmith*, prefixed to an edition of his works, "he made so many charming combinations, really differing from each other, and all, though suggested by fact, yet hung so sweetly in an ideal air, proved what an artist he was, and was better than much that is commonly called invention. In short, if there is a sameness of effect in Goldsmith's writings, it is because they consist of poetry and truth, humour and pathos, from his own life, and the supply from such a life as his was not inexhaustible."

The question of invention is easily disposed of. Any child can invent a world transcending human experience by the simple combination of ideas which are in themselves incongruous—a world in which the horses have each five feet, in which the grass is blue and the sky green, in which seas are balanced on the peaks of mountains. The result is unbelievable and worthless. But the writer of imaginative literature uses his own experiences and the experiences of others, so that his combination of ideas in themselves compatible shall appear so natural and believable that the reader—although these incidents and characters never did actually exist—is as much interested in them as if they had existed. The mischief of it is that the reader

sometimes thinks himself very clever, and, recognising a little bit of the story as having happened to the author, jumps to the conclusion that such and such a passage is necessarily autobiographical. Hence it is that Goldsmith has been hastily identified with the Philosophic Vagabond in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and with the Man in Black in the *Citizen of the World*. That he may have used certain experiences in the one, and that he may perhaps have given in the other a sort of fancy sketch of a person suggested by some trait in his own character, is possible enough; but further assertion of likeness is impossible. That the Man in Black had one of Goldsmith's little weaknesses is obvious enough: we find him just a trifle too conscious of his own kindliness and generosity. The Vicar of Wakefield himself is not without a spice of this amiable vanity. As for Goldsmith, every one must remember his reply to Griffiths' accusation: "No, sir, had I been a sharper, *had I been possessed of less good nature and native generosity*, I might surely now have been in better circumstances."

The Man in Black, in any case, is a delightful character. We detect the warm and generous nature even in his pretence of having acquired worldly wisdom: "I now therefore pursued a course of uninterrupted frugality, seldom wanted a dinner, and was consequently invited to twenty. I soon began to get the character of a saving hunks that had money, and insensibly grew into esteem. Neighbours have asked my advice in the disposal of their daughters; and I have always taken care not to give any. I have contracted a friendship with an alderman, only by observing, that if we take a farthing

from a thousand pounds it will be a thousand pounds no longer. I have been invited to a pawnbroker's table, by pretending to hate gravy; and am now actually upon treaty of marriage with a rich widow, for only having observed that the bread was rising. If ever I am asked a question, whether I know it or not, instead of answering, I only smile and look wise. If a charity is proposed I go about with the hat, but put nothing in myself. If a wretch solicits my pity, I observe that the world is filled with impostors, and take a certain method of not being deceived by never relieving. In short, I now find the truest way of finding esteem, even from the indigent, is to give away nothing, and thus have much in our power to give." This is a very clever piece of writing, whether it is in strict accordance with the character of the Man in Black, or not. But there is in these *Public Ledger* papers another sketch of character, which is not only consistent in itself, and in every way admirable, but is of still further interest to us when we remember that at this time the various personages in the *Vicar of Wakefield* were no doubt gradually assuming definite form in Goldsmith's mind. It is in the figure of Mr. Tibbs, introduced apparently at haphazard, but at once taking possession of us by its quaint relief, that we find Goldsmith showing a firmer hand in character-drawing. With a few happy dramatic touches Mr. Tibbs starts into life; he speaks for himself; he becomes one of the people whom we know. And yet, with this concise and sharp portraiture of a human being, look at the graceful, almost garrulous, ease of the style :—

"Our pursuer soon came up and joined us with all the familiarity of an old acquaintance. 'My dear Drybone,' cries he, shaking my friend's hand, 'where have you been hiding this half a century? Positively I had fancied you were gone to cultivate matrimony and your estate in the country.' During the reply I had an opportunity of surveying the appearance of our new companion: his hat was pinched up with peculiar smartness; his looks were pale, thin, and sharp; round his neck he wore a broad black riband, and in his bosom a buckle studded with glass; his coat was trimmed with tarnished twist; he wore by his side a sword with a black hilt; and his stockings of silk, though newly washed, were grown yellow by long service. I was so much engaged with the peculiarity of his dress, that I attended only to the latter part of my friend's reply, in which he complimented Mr. Tibbs on the taste of his clothes and the bloom in his countenance. 'Pshaw, pshaw, Will,' cried the figure, 'no more of that, if you love me: you know I hate flattery, —on my soul I do; and yet, to be sure, an intimacy with the great will improve one's appearance, and a course of venison will fatten; and yet, faith, I despise the great as much as you do; but there are a great many damn'd honest fellows among them, and we must not quarrel with one half, because the other wants weeding. If they were all such as my Lord Mudler, one of the most good-natured creatures that ever squeezed a lemon, I should myself be among the number of their admirers. I was yesterday to dine at the Duchess of Piccadilly's. My lord was there. "Ned," says he to me, "Ned," says he, "I'll hold gold to silver,

I can tell you where you were poaching last night." "Poaching, my lord?" says I: "faith, you have missed already; for I staid at home and let the girls poach for me. That's my way: I take a fine woman as some animals do their prey—stand still, and, swoop, they fall into my mouth."' 'Ah, Tibbs, thou art a happy fellow,' cried my companion, with looks of infinite pity; 'I hope your fortune is as much improved as your understanding, in such company?' 'Improved!' replied the other: 'you shall know,—but let it go no farther—a great secret—five hundred a year to begin with—my lord's word of honour for it. His lordship took me down in his own chariot yesterday, and we had a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the country, where we talked of nothing else.'—'I fancy you forget, sir,' cried I; 'you told us but this moment of your dining yesterday in town.'—'Did I say so?' replied he, coolly; 'to be sure, if I said so, it was so. Dined in town! egad, now I do remember, I did dine in town; but I dined in the country too; for you must know, my boys, I ate two dinners. By the bye, I am grown as nice as the devil in my eating. I'll tell you a pleasant affair about that: we were a select party of us to dine at Lady Grogram's,—an affected piece, but let it go no farther—a secret.—Well, there happened to be no asafœtida in the sauce to a turkey, upon which, says I, I'll hold a thousand guineas, and say done, first, that—But, dear Drybone, you are an honest creature; lend me half-a-crown for a minute or two, or so, just till ——; but hearkee, ask me for it the next time we meet, or it may be twenty to one but I forget to pay you.'"

Returning from these performances to the author of them, we find him a busy man of letters, becoming more and more in request among the booksellers, and obtaining recognition among his fellow-writers. He had moved into better lodgings in Wine Office Court (1760-2); and it was here that he entertained at supper, as has already been mentioned, no less distinguished guests than Bishop, then Mr., Percy, and Dr., then Mr., Johnson. Every one has heard of the surprise of Percy, on calling for Johnson, to find the great Cham dressed with quite unusual smartness. On asking the cause of this "singular transformation," Johnson replied, "Why, sir, I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard of cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice; and I am desirous this night to show him a better example." That Goldsmith profited by this example—though the tailors did not—is clear enough. At times, indeed, he blossomed out into the splendours of a dandy; and laughed at himself for doing so. But whether he was in gorgeous or in mean attire, he remained the same sort of happy-go-lucky creature; working hard by fits and starts; continually getting money in advance from the booksellers; enjoying the present hour; and apparently happy enough when not pressed by debt. That he should have been thus pressed was no necessity of the case; at all events we need not on this score begin now to abuse the booksellers or the public of that day. We may dismiss once for all the oft-repeated charges of ingratitude and neglect.

When Goldsmith was writing those letters in the *Public Ledger*—with "pleasure and instruction for others," Mr. Forster says, "though at the cost of suffering to

himself"—he was receiving for them alone what would be equivalent in our day to £200 a year. No man can affirm that £200 a year is not amply sufficient for all the material wants of life. Of course there are fine things in the world that that amount of annual wage cannot purchase. It is a fine thing to sit on the deck of a yacht on a summer's day, and watch the far islands shining over the blue; it is a fine thing to drive four-in-hand to Ascot—if you can do it; it is a fine thing to cower breathless behind a rock and find a splendid stag coming slowly within sure range. But these things are not necessary to human happiness: it is possible to do without them and yet not "suffer." Even if Goldsmith had given half of his substance away to the poor, there was enough left to cover all the necessary wants of a human being; and if he chose so to order his affairs as to incur the suffering of debt, why, that was his own business, about which nothing further needs be said. It is to be suspected, indeed, that he did not care to practise those excellent maxims of prudence and frugality which he frequently preached; but the world is not much concerned about that now. If Goldsmith had received ten times as much money as the booksellers gave him, he would still have died in debt. And it is just possible that we may exaggerate Goldsmith's sensitiveness on this score. He had had a life-long familiarity with duns and borrowing; and seemed very contented when the exigency of the hour was tided over. An angry landlady is unpleasant, and an arrest is awkward; but in comes an opportune guinea, and the bottle of Madeira is opened forthwith.

In these rooms in Wine Office Court, and at the

suggestion or entreaty of Newbery, Goldsmith produced a good deal of miscellaneous writing pamphlets, tracts, compilations, and what not—of a more or less marketable kind. It can only be surmised that by this time he may have formed some idea of producing a book not solely meant for the market, and that the characters in the *Vicar of Wakefield* were already engaging his attention; but the surmise becomes probable enough when we remember that his project of writing the *Traveller*, which was not published till 1764, had been formed as far back as 1755, while he was wandering aimlessly about Europe, and that a sketch of the poem was actually forwarded by him then to his brother Henry in Ireland. But in the meantime this hack-work, and the habits of life connected with it, began to tell on Goldsmith's health; and so, for a time, he left London (1762), and went to Tunbridge and then to Bath. It is scarcely possible that his modest fame had preceded him to the latter place of fashion; but it may be that the distinguished folk of the town received this friend of the great Dr. Johnson with some small measure of distinction; for we find that his next published work, *The Life of Richard Nash, Esq.*, is respectfully dedicated to the Right Worshipful the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen, and Common Council of the City of Bath. The Life of the recently deceased Master of Ceremonies was published anonymously (1762); but it was generally understood to be Goldsmith's; and indeed the secret of the authorship is revealed in every successive line. Among the minor writings of Goldsmith there is none more delightful than this: the mock-heroic gravity, the half-familiar contemptuous good-nature with which he composes

this Funeral March of a Marionette, are extremely whimsical and amusing. And then what an admirable picture we get of fashionable English society in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Bath and Nash were alike in the heyday of their glory—the fine ladies with their snuff-boxes, and their passion for play, and their extremely effective language when they got angry ; young bucks come to flourish away their money, and gain by their losses the sympathy of the fair ; sharpers on the look-out for guineas, and adventurers on the look-out for weak-minded heiresses ; duchesses writing letters in the most doubtful English, and chairmen swearing at any one who dared to walk home on foot at night.

No doubt the Life of Beau Nash was a bookseller's book ; and it was made as attractive as possible by the recapitulation of all sorts of romantic stories about Miss S——n, and Mr. C——e, and Captain K——g ; but throughout we find the historian very much inclined to laugh at his hero, and only refraining now and again in order to record in serious language traits indicative of the real goodness of disposition of that fop and gambler. And the fine ladies and gentlemen, who lived in that atmosphere of scandal, and intrigue, and gambling, are also from time to time treated to a little decorous and respectful raillery. Who does not remember the famous laws of polite breeding written out by Mr. Nash—Goldsmith hints that neither Mr. Nash nor his fair correspondent at Blenheim, the Duchess of Marlborough, excelled in English composition—for the guidance of the ladies and gentlemen who were under the sway of the King of Bath ? "But were we to give

laws to a nursery, we should make them childish laws," Goldsmith writes gravely. "His statutes, though stupid, were addressed to fine gentlemen and ladies, and were probably received with sympathetic approbation. It is certain they were in general religiously observed by his subjects, and executed by him with impartiality; neither rank nor fortune shielded the refractory from his resentment." Nash, however, was not content with prose in enforcing good manners. Having waged deadly war against the custom of wearing boots, and having found his ordinary armoury of no avail against the obduracy of the country squires, he assailed them in the impassioned language of poetry, and produced the following "Invitation to the Assembly," which, as Goldsmith remarks, was highly relished by the nobility at Bath on account of its keenness, severity, and particularly its good rhymes.

"Come, one and all, to Hoyden Hall,
For there's the assembly this night;
None but prude fools
Mind manners and rules;
We Hoydens do decency slight.
Come, trollops and slatterns,
Cocked hats and white aprons,
This best our modesty suits;
For why should not we
In dress be as free
As Hogs-Norton squires in boots?"

The sarcasm was too much for the squires, who yielded in a body; and when any stranger through inadvertence presented himself in the assembly-rooms in boots, Nash was so completely master of the situation that he would

politely step up to the intruder and suggest that he had forgotten his horse.

Goldsmith does not magnify the intellectual capacity of his hero; but he gives him credit for a sort of rude wit that was sometimes effective enough. His physician, for example, having called on him to see whether he had followed a prescription that had been sent him the previous day, was greeted in this fashion: "Followed your prescription? No. Egad, if I had, I should have broken my neck, for I flung it out of the two pair of stairs window." For the rest, this diverting biography contains some excellent warnings against the vice of gambling; with a particular account of the manner in which the Government of the day tried by statute after statute to suppress the tables at Tunbridge and Bath, thereby only driving the sharpers to new subterfuges. That the Beau was in alliance with sharpers, or, at least, that he was a sleeping partner in the firm, his biographer admits; but it is urged on his behalf that he was the most generous of winners, and again and again interfered to prevent the ruin of some gambler by whose folly he would himself have profited. His constant charity was well known; the money so lightly come by was at the disposal of any one who could prefer a piteous tale. Moreover he made no scruple about exacting from others that charity which they could well afford. One may easily guess who was the duchess mentioned in the following story of Goldsmith's narration:—

"The sums he gave and collected for the Hospital were great, and his manner of doing it was no less admirable. I am told that he was once collecting money in Wilt-

shire's room for that purpose, when a lady entered, who is more remarkable for her wit than her charity, and not being able to pass by him unobserved, she gave him a pat with her fan, and said, 'You must put down a trifle for me, Nash, for I have no money in my pocket.' 'Yes, madam,' says he, 'that I will with pleasure, if your grace will tell me when to stop;' then taking an handful of guineas out of his pocket, he began to tell them into his white hat — 'One, two, three, four, five——' 'Hold, hold!' says the duchess, 'consider what you are about.' 'Consider your rank and fortune, madam,' says Nash, and continues telling—'six, seven, eight, nine, ten.' Here the duchess called again, and seemed angry. 'Pray compose yourself, madam,' cried Nash, 'and don't interrupt the work of charity,—eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.' Here the duchess stormed, and caught hold of his hand. 'Peace, madam,' says Nash, 'you shall have your name written in letters of gold, madam, and upon the front of the building, madam, —sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty.' 'I won't pay a farthing more,' says the duchess. 'Charity hides a multitude of sins,' replies Nash,— 'twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five.' 'Nash,' says she, 'I protest you frighten me out of my wits. L—d, I shall die!' 'Madam, you will never die with doing good; and if you do, it will be the better for you,' answered Nash, and was about to proceed; but perceiving her grace had lost all patience, a parley ensued, when he, after much altercation, agreed to stop his hand and compound with her grace for thirty guineas. The duchess, however, seemed displeased the whole evening, and when he came to the

table where she was playing, bid him, 'Stand farther, an ugly devil, for she hated the sight of him.' But her grace afterwards having a run of good luck, called Nash to her. 'Come,' says she, 'I will be friends with you, though you are a fool; and to let you see I am not angry, there is ten guineas more for your charity. But this I insist on, that neither my name nor the sum shall be mentioned.'"

At the ripe age of eighty-seven the "beau of three generations" breathed his last (1761); and, though he had fallen into poor ways, there were those alive who remembered his former greatness, and who chronicled it in a series of epitaphs and poetical lamentations. "One thing is common almost with all of them," says Goldsmith, "and that is that Venus, Cupid, and the Graces are commanded to weep, and that Bath shall never find such another." These effusions are forgotten now; and so would Beau Nash be also, but for this biography, which, no doubt meant merely for the book-market of the day, lives and is of permanent value by reason of the charm of its style, its pervading humour, and the vivacity of its descriptions of the fashionable follies of the eighteenth century. *Nullum fere genus scribendi non tetigit. Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.* Who but Goldsmith could have written so delightful a book about such a poor creature as Beau Nash?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARREST.

It was no doubt owing to Newbery that Goldsmith, after his return to London, was induced to abandon, temporarily or altogether, his apartments in Wine Office Court, and take lodgings in the house of a Mrs. Fleming, who lived somewhere or other in Islington. Newbery had rooms in Canonbury House, a curious old building that still exists; and it may have occurred to the publisher that Goldsmith, in this suburban district, would not only be nearer him for consultation and so forth, but also might pay more attention to his duties than when he was among the temptations of Fleet Street. Goldsmith was working industriously in the service of Newbery at this time (1763-4); in fact, so completely was the bookseller in possession of the hack, that Goldsmith's board and lodging in Mrs. Fleming's house, arranged for at £50 a year, was paid by Newbery himself. Writing prefaces, revising new editions, contributing reviews—this was the sort of work he undertook, with more or less content, as the equivalent of the modest sums Mr. Newbery disbursed for him or handed over as pocket-money. In the midst of all this drudgery he was now secretly engaged on work that aimed at something

higher than mere payment of bed and board. The smooth lines of the *Traveller* were receiving further polish; the gentle-natured *Vicar* was writing his simple, quaint, tender story. And no doubt Goldsmith was spurred to try something better than hack-work by the associations that he was now forming, chiefly under the wise and benevolent friendship of Johnson.

Anxious always to be thought well of, he was now beginning to meet people whose approval was worthy of being sought. He had been introduced to Reynolds. He had become the friend of Hogarth. He had even made the acquaintance of Mr. Boswell, from Scotland. Moreover, he had been invited to become one of the original members of the famous Club of which so much has been written; his fellow-members being Reynolds, Johnson, Burke, Hawkins, Beauclerk, Bennet Langton, and Dr. Nugent. It is almost certain that it was at Johnson's instigation that he had been admitted into this choice fellowship. Long before either the *Traveller* or the *Vicar* had been heard of, Johnson had perceived the literary genius that obscurely burned in the uncouth figure of this Irishman; and was anxious to impress on others Goldsmith's claims to respect and consideration. In the minute record kept by Boswell of his first evening with Johnson at the Mitre Tavern, we find Johnson saying, "Dr. Goldsmith is one of the first men we now have as an author, and he is a very worthy man too. He has been loose in his principles, but he is coming right." Johnson took walks with Goldsmith; did him the honour of disputing with him on all occasions; bought a copy of the *Life of Nash* when it appeared—an unusual compliment for one author to pay another, in their day or in

ours; allowed him to call on Miss Williams, the blind old lady in Bolt Court; and generally was his friend, counsellor, and champion. Accordingly, when Mr. Boswell entertained the great Cham to supper at the Mitre—a sudden quarrel with his landlord having made it impossible for him to order the banquet at his own house—he was careful to have Dr. Goldsmith of the company. His guests that evening were Johnson, Goldsmith, Davies (the actor and bookseller who had conferred on Boswell the invaluable favour of an introduction to Johnson), Mr. Eccles, and the Rev. Mr. Ogilvie, a Scotch poet who deserves our gratitude because it was his inopportune patriotism that provoked, on this very evening, the memorable epigram about the high-road leading to England. "Goldsmith," says Boswell, who had not got over his envy at Goldsmith's being allowed to visit the blind old pensioner in Bolt court, "as usual, endeavoured with too much eagerness to *shine*, and disputed very warmly with Johnson against the well-known maxim of the British constitution, 'The king can do no wrong.'" It was a dispute not so much about facts as about phraseology; and, indeed, there seems to be no great warmth in the expressions used on either side. Goldsmith affirmed that "what was morally false could not be politically true;" and that, in short, the king could by the misuse of his regal power do wrong. Johnson replied, that, in such a case, the immediate agents of the king were the persons to be tried and punished for the offence. "The king, though he should command, cannot force a judge to condemn a man unjustly; therefore it is the judge whom we prosecute and punish." But when he stated that the king "is

above everything, and there is no power by which he can be tried," he was surely forgetting an important chapter in English history. "What did Cromwell do for his country?" he himself asked, during his subsequent visit to Scotland, of old Auchinleck, Boswell's father. "God, Doctor," replied the vile Whig, "*he garred kings ken they had a lith in their necks.*"

For some time after this evening Goldsmith drops out of Boswell's famous memoir; perhaps the compiler was not anxious to give him too much prominence. They had not liked each other from the outset. Boswell, vexed by the greater intimacy of Goldsmith with Johnson, called him a blunderer, a feather-brained person; and described his appearance in no flattering terms. Goldsmith, on the other hand, on being asked who was this Scotch cur that followed Johnson's heels, answered, "He is not a cur: you are too severe—he is only a bur. Tom Davies flung him at Johnson in sport, and he has the faculty of sticking." Boswell would probably have been more tolerant of Goldsmith as a rival, if he could have known that on a future day he was to have Johnson all to himself—to carry him to remote wilds and exhibit him as a portentous literary phenomenon to Highland lairds. It is true that Johnson, at an early period of his acquaintance with Boswell, did talk vaguely about a trip to the Hebrides; but the young Scotch idolater thought it was all too good to be true. The mention of Sir James Macdonald, says Boswell, "led us to talk of the Western Islands of Scotland, to visit which he expressed a wish that then appeared to me a very romantic fancy, which I little thought would be afterwards realised. He told

me that his father had put Martin's account of those islands into his hands when he was very young, and that he was highly pleased with it; that he was particularly struck with the St. Kilda man's notion that the high church of Glasgow had been hollowed out of a rock; a circumstance to which old Mr. Johnson had directed his attention." Unfortunately Goldsmith not only disappears from the pages of Boswell's biography at this time, but also in great measure from the ken of his companions. He was deeply in debt; no doubt the fine clothes he had been ordering from Mr. Filby in order that he might "shine" among those notable persons, had something to do with it; he had tried the patience of the booksellers; and he had been devoting a good deal of time to work not intended to elicit immediate payment. The most patient endeavours to trace out his changes of lodgings, and the fugitive writings that kept him in daily bread, have not been very successful. It is to be presumed that Goldsmith had occasionally to go into hiding to escape from his creditors; and so was missed from his familiar haunts. We only reach daylight again, to find Goldsmith being under threat of arrest from his landlady; and for the particulars of this famous affair it is necessary to return to Boswell.

Boswell was not in London at that time; but his account was taken down subsequently from Johnson's narration; and his accuracy in other matters, his extraordinary memory, and scrupulous care, leave no doubt in the mind that his version of the story is to be preferred to those of Mrs. Piozzi and Sir John Hawkins. We may take it that these are Johnson's own words:—

"I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return; and, having gone to a bookseller, sold it for £60. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."

We do not know who this landlady was—it cannot now be made out whether the incident occurred at Islington, or in the rooms that Goldsmith partially occupied in the Temple; but even if Mrs. Fleming be the landlady in question, she was deserving neither of Goldsmith's rating nor of the reprimands that have been bestowed upon her by later writers. Mrs. Fleming had been exceedingly kind to Goldsmith. Again and again in her bills we find items significantly marked £0 0*s.* 0*d.* And if her accounts with her lodger did get hopelessly into arrear; and if she was annoyed by seeing him go out in fine clothes to sup at the Mitre; and if, at length, her patience gave way, and she determined to have her rights in one way or another, she was no worse

than landladies—who are only human beings, and not divinely appointed protectresses of genius—ordinarily are. Mrs. Piozzi says that when Johnson came back with the money, Goldsmith "called the woman of the house directly to partake of punch, and pass their time in merriment." This would be a dramatic touch; but, after Johnson's quietly corking the bottle of Madeira, it is more likely that no such thing occurred; especially as Boswell quotes the statement as an "extreme inaccuracy."

The novel which Johnson had taken away and sold to Francis Newbery, a nephew of the elder bookseller, was, as every one knows, the *Vicar of Wakefield*. That Goldsmith, amidst all his pecuniary distresses, should have retained this piece in his desk, instead of pawning or promising it to one of his bookselling patrons, points to but one conclusion—that he was building high hopes on it, and was determined to make it as good as lay within his power. Goldsmith put an anxious finish into all his better work; perhaps that is the secret of the graceful ease that is now apparent in every line. Any young writer who may imagine that the power of clear and concise literary expression comes by nature, cannot do better than study, in Mr. Cunningham's big collection of Goldsmith's writings, the continual and minute alterations which the author considered necessary even after the first edition—sometimes when the second and third editions—had been published. Many of these, especially in the poetical works, were merely improvements in sound as suggested by a singularly sensitive ear, as when he altered the line

"Amidst the ruin, heedless of the dead,"

which had appeared in the first three editions of the *Traveller*, into

"There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,"

which appeared in the fourth. But the majority of the omissions and corrections were prompted by a careful taste, that abhorred everything redundant or slovenly. It has been suggested that when Johnson carried off the *Vicar of Wakefield* to Francis Newbery, the manuscript was not quite finished, but had to be completed afterwards. There was at least plenty of time for that. Newbery does not appear to have imagined that he had obtained a prize in the lottery of literature. He paid the £60 for it—clearly on the assurance of the great father of learning of the day, that there was merit in the little story—somewhere about the end of 1764; but the tale was not issued to the public until March, 1766. "And, sir," remarked Johnson to Boswell, with regard to the sixty pounds, "a sufficient price too, when it was sold; for then the fame of Goldsmith had not been elevated, as it afterwards was, by his *Traveller;* and the bookseller had such faint hopes of profit by his bargain, that he kept the manuscript by him a long time, and did not publish it till after the *Traveller* had appeared. Then, to be sure, it was accidentally worth more money."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAVELLER.

This poem of the *Traveller*, the fruit of much secret labour and the consummation of the hopes of many years, was lying completed in Goldsmith's desk when the incident of the arrest occurred; and the elder Newbery had undertaken to publish it. Then, as at other times, Johnson lent this wayward child of genius a friendly hand. He read over the proof-sheets for Goldsmith; was so kind as to put in a line here or there where he thought fit; and prepared a notice of the poem for the *Critical Review*. The time for the appearance of this new claimant for poetical honours was propitious. "There was perhaps no point in the century," says Professor Masson, "when the British Muse, such as she had come to be, was doing less, or had so nearly ceased to do anything, or to have any good opinion of herself, as precisely about the year 1764. Young was dying; Gray was recluse and indolent; Johnson had long given over his metrical experimentations on any except the most inconsiderable scale; Akenside, Armstrong, Smollett, and others less known, had pretty well revealed the amount of their

worth in poetry; and Churchill, after his ferocious blaze of what was really rage and declamation in metre, though conventionally it was called poetry, was prematurely defunct. Into this lull came Goldsmith's short but carefully finished poem." "There has not been so fine a poem since Pope's time," remarked Johnson to Boswell, on the very first evening after the return of young Auchinleck to London. It would have been no matter for surprise had Goldsmith dedicated this first work that he published under his own name to Johnson, who had for so long been his constant friend and adviser; and such a dedication would have carried weight in certain quarters. But there was a finer touch in Goldsmith's thought of inscribing the book to his brother Henry; and no doubt the public were surprised and pleased to find a poor devil of an author dedicating a work to an Irish parson with £40 a year, from whom he could not well expect any return. It will be remembered that it was to this brother Henry that Goldsmith, ten years before, had sent the first sketch of the poem; and now the wanderer,

> "Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,"

declares how his heart untravelled

> "Still to my brother turns, with ceaseless pain,
> And drags at each remove a lengthening chain."

The very first line of the poem strikes a key-note—there is in it a pathetic thrill of distance, and regret, and longing; and it has the soft musical sound that pervades the whole composition. It is exceedingly interesting to

note, as has already been mentioned, how Goldsmith altered and altered these lines until he had got them full of gentle vowel sounds. Where, indeed, in the English language could one find more graceful melody than this?—

> "The naked negro, panting at the line,
> Boasts of his golden sands and palmy wine,
> Basks in the glare, or stems the tepid wave,
> And thanks his gods for all the good they gave."

It has been observed also that Goldsmith was the first to introduce into English poetry sonorous American —or rather Indian—names, as when he writes in this poem,

> "Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,
> And Niagara stuns with thundering sound,"

—and if it be charged against him that he ought to have known the proper accentuation of Niagara, it may be mentioned as a set-off that Sir Walter Scott, in dealing with his own country, mis-accentuated "Glenaládale," to say nothing of his having made of Rosencath an island. Another characteristic of the *Traveller* is the extraordinary choiceness and conciseness of the diction, which, instead of suggesting pedantry or affectation, betrays on the contrary nothing but a delightful ease and grace.

The English people are very fond of good English; and thus it is that couplets from the *Traveller* and the *Deserted Village* have come into the common stock of our language, and that sometimes not so much on account of the ideas they convey, as through their

singular precision of epithet and musical sound. It is enough to make the angels weep, to find such a couplet as this—

> "Cheerful at morn, he wakes from short repose,
> Breasts the keen air, and carols as he goes,"

murdered in several editions of Goldsmith's works by the substitution of the commonplace "breathes" for "breasts"—and that, after Johnson had drawn particular attention to the line by quoting it in his Dictionary. Perhaps, indeed, it may be admitted that the literary charm of the *Traveller* is more apparent than the value of any doctrine, however profound or ingenious, which the poem was supposed to inculcate. We forget all about the "particular principle of happiness" possessed by each European state, in listening to the melody of the singer, and in watching the successive and delightful pictures that he calls up before the imagination.

> "As in those domes where Cæsars once bore sway,
> Defaced by time, and tottering in decay,
> There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,
> The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed;
> And, wondering man could want the larger pile,
> Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile."

Then notice the blaze of patriotic idealism that bursts forth when he comes to talk of England. What sort of England had he been familiar with when he was consorting with the meanest wretches—the poverty stricken, the sick, and squalid—in those Fleet-Street dens? But it is an England of bright streams and spacious lawns

of which he writes; and as for the people who inhabit the favoured land—

> "Stern o'er each bosom reason holds her state,
> With daring aims irregularly great;
> Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,
> I see the lords of human kind pass by."

"Whenever I write anything," Goldsmith had said, with a humorous exaggeration which Boswell, as usual, takes *au sérieux*, "the public *make a point* to know nothing about it." But we have Johnson's testimony to the fact that the *Traveller* "brought him into high reputation." No wonder. When the great Cham declares it to be the finest poem published since the time of Pope, we are irresistibly forced to think of the *Essay on Man*. What a contrast there is between that tedious and stilted effort, and this clear burst of bird-song! The *Traveller*, however, did not immediately become popular. It was largely talked about, naturally, among Goldsmith's friends; and Johnson would scarcely suffer any criticism of it. At a dinner given long afterwards at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, and fully reported by the invaluable Boswell, Reynolds remarked, "I was glad to hear Charles Fox say it was one of the finest poems in the English language." "Why were you glad?" said Langton. "You surely had no doubt of this before?" Hereupon Johnson struck in: "No; the merit of the *Traveller* is so well established, that Mr. Fox's praise cannot augment it, nor his censure diminish it." And he went on to say—Goldsmith having died and got beyond the reach of all critics and creditors some three or four years before this time—

"Goldsmith was a man who, whatever he wrote, did it better than any other man could do. He deserved a place in Westminster Abbey; and every year he lived would have deserved it better."

Presently people began to talk about the new poem. A second edition was issued; a third; a fourth. It is not probable that Goldsmith gained any pecuniary benefit from the growing popularity of the little book; but he had "struck for honest fame," and that was now coming to him. He even made some slight acquaintance with "the great;" and here occurs an incident which is one of many that account for the love that the English people have for Goldsmith. It appears that Hawkins, calling one day on the Earl of Northumberland, found the author of the *Traveller* waiting in the outer room, in response to an invitation. Hawkins, having finished his own business, retired, but lingered about until the interview between Goldsmith and his lordship was over, having some curiosity about the result. Here follows Goldsmith's report to Hawkins. "His lordship told me he had read my poem, and was much delighted with it; that he was going to be Lord-lieutenant of Ireland; and that, hearing that I was a native of that country, he should be glad to do me any kindness." "What did you answer?" says Hawkins, no doubt expecting to hear of some application for pension or post. "Why," said Goldsmith, "I could say nothing but that I had a brother there, a clergyman, that stood in need of help," —and then he explained to Hawkins that he looked to the booksellers for support, and was not inclined to place dependence on the promises of great men. "Thus did this idiot in the affairs of the world," adds Hawkins,

with a fatuity that is quite remarkable in its way, "trifle with his fortunes, and put back the hand that was held out to assist him! Other offers of a like kind he either rejected or failed to improve, contenting himself with the patronage of one nobleman, whose mansion afforded him the delights of a splendid table and a retreat for a few days from the metropolis." It is a great pity we have not a description from the same pen of Johnson's insolent ingratitude in flinging the pair of boots down stairs.

CHAPTER X.

MISCELLANEOUS WRITING.

But one pecuniary result of this growing fame was a joint offer on the part of Griffin and Newbery of £20 for a selection from his printed essays; and this selection was forthwith made and published, with a preface written for the occasion. Here at once we can see that Goldsmith takes firmer ground. There is an air of confidence—of gaiety, even—in his address to the public; although, as usual, accompanied by a whimsical mock-modesty that is extremely odd and effective. "Whatever right I have to complain of the public," he says, "they can, as yet, have no just reason to complain of me. If I have written dull Essays, they have hitherto treated them as dull Essays. Thus far we are at least upon par, and until they think fit to make me their humble debtor by praise, I am resolved not to lose a single inch of my self-importance. Instead, therefore, of attempting to establish a credit amongst them, it will perhaps be wiser to apply to some more distant correspondent; and as my drafts are in some danger of being protested at home, it may not be imprudent, upon this occasion, to draw my bills upon Posterity.

"MR. POSTERITY,

"SIR,—Nine hundred and ninety-nine years after sight hereof pay the bearer, or order, a thousand pounds worth of praise, free from all deductions whatsoever, it being a commodity that will then be very serviceable to him, and place it to the account of, &c."

The bill is not yet due; but there can in the meantime be no harm in discounting it so far as to say that these Essays deserve very decided praise. They deal with all manner of topics, matters of fact, matters of imagination, humorous descriptions, learned criticisms; and then, whenever the entertainer thinks he is becoming dull, he suddenly tells a quaint little story and walks off amidst the laughter he knows he has produced. It is not a very ambitious or sonorous sort of literature; but it was admirably fitted for its aim—the passing of the immediate hour in an agreeable and fairly intellectual way. One can often see, no doubt, that these Essays are occasionally written in a more or less perfunctory fashion, the writer not being moved by much enthusiasm in his subject; but even then a quaint literary grace seldom fails to atone, as when, writing about the English clergy, and complaining that they do not sufficiently in their addresses stoop to mean capacities, he says—"Whatever may become of the higher orders of mankind, who are generally possessed of collateral motives to virtue, the vulgar should be particularly regarded, whose behaviour in civil life is totally hinged upon their hopes and fears. Those who constitute the basis of the great fabric of society should be particularly regarded; for in policy, as in architecture, ruin is most fatal when it begins from the bottom." There was,

indeed, throughout Goldsmith's miscellaneous writing much more common sense than might have been expected from a writer who was supposed to have none.

As regards his chance criticisms on dramatic and poetical literature, these are generally found to be incisive and just; while sometimes they exhibit a wholesome disregard of mere tradition and authority. "Milton's translation of Horace's Ode to Pyrrha," he says, for example, "is universally known and generally admired, in our opinion much above its merit." If the present writer might for a moment venture into such an arena, he would express the honest belief that that translation is the very worst translation that was ever made of anything. But there is the happy rendering of *simplex munditiis*, which counts for much.

By this time Goldsmith had also written his charming ballad of *Edwin and Angelina*, which was privately "printed for the amusement of the Countess of Northumberland," and which afterwards appeared in the *Vicar of Wakefield*. It seems clear enough that this quaint and pathetic piece was suggested by an old ballad beginning,

> "Gentle heardsman, tell to me,
> Of curtesy I thee pray,
> Unto the towne of Walsingham
> Which is the right and ready way,"

which Percy had shown to Goldsmith, and which, patched up, subsequently appeared in the *Reliques*. But Goldsmith's ballad is original enough to put aside all the discussion about plagiarism which was afterwards started.

In the old fragment the weeping pilgrim receives directions from the herdsman, and goes on her way, and we hear of her no more; in *Edwin and Angelina* the forlorn and despairing maiden suddenly finds herself confronted by the long-lost lover whom she had so cruelly used. This is the dramatic touch that reveals the hand of the artist. And here again it is curious to note the care with which Goldsmith repeatedly revised his writings. The ballad originally ended with these two stanzas:—

> "Here amidst sylvan bowers we'll rove,
> From lawn to woodland stray;
> Blest as the songsters of the grove,
> And innocent as they.
>
> "To all that want, and all that wail,
> Our pity shall be given,
> And when this life of love shall fail,
> We'll love again in heaven."

But subsequently it must have occurred to the author that, the dramatic disclosure once made, and the lovers restored to each other, any lingering over the scene only weakened the force of the climax; hence these stanzas were judiciously excised. It may be doubted, however, whether the original version of the last couplet:

> "And the last sigh that rends the heart
> Shall break thy Edwin's too,"

was improved by being altered into

> "The sigh that rends thy constant heart
> Shall break thy Edwin's too."

Meanwhile Goldsmith had resorted to hack-work again; nothing being expected from the *Vicar of Wakefield*, now lying in Newbery's shop, for that had been paid for, and his expenses were increasing, as became his greater station. In the interval between the publication of the *Traveller* and of the *Vicar*, he moved into better chambers in Garden Court; he hired a man-servant, he blossomed out into very fine clothes. Indeed, so effective did his first suit seem to be—the purple silk small-clothes, the scarlet roquelaure, the wig, sword, and gold-headed cane—that, as Mr. Forster says, he "amazed his friends with no less than three similar suits, not less expensive, in the next six months." Part of this display was no doubt owing to a suggestion from Reynolds that Goldsmith, having a medical degree, might just as well add the practice of a physician to his literary work, to magnify his social position. Goldsmith, always willing to please his friends, acceded; but his practice does not appear to have been either extensive or long-continued. It is said that he drew out a prescription for a certain Mrs. Sidebotham which so appalled the apothecary that he refused to make it up; and that, as the lady sided with the apothecary, he threw up the case and his profession at the same time. If it was money Goldsmith wanted, he was not likely to get it in that way; he had neither the appearance nor the manner fitted to humour the sick and transform healthy people into valetudinarians. If it was the esteem of his friends and popularity outside that circle, he was soon to acquire enough of both. On the 27th March, 1766, fifteen months after the appearance of the *Traveller*, the *Vicar of Wakefield* was published.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.

The *Vicar of Wakefield*, considered structurally, follows the lines of the Book of Job. You take a good man, overwhelm him with successive misfortunes, show the pure flame of his soul burning in the midst of the darkness, and then, as the reward of his patience and fortitude and submission, restore him gradually to happiness, with even larger flocks and herds than before. The machinery by which all this is brought about is, in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the weak part of the story. The plot is full of wild improbabilities; in fact, the expedients by which all the members of the family are brought together and made happy at the same time, are nothing short of desperate. It is quite clear, too, that the author does not know what to make of the episode of Olivia and her husband; they are allowed to drop through; we leave him playing the French horn at a relation's house; while she, in her father's home, is supposed to be unnoticed, so much are they all taken up with the rejoicings over the double wedding. It is very probable that when Goldsmith began the story he had no very definite plot concocted; and that it was only

when the much-persecuted Vicar had to be restored to happiness, that he found the entanglements surrounding him, and had to make frantic efforts to break through them. But, be that as it may, it is not for the plot that people now read the *Vicar of Wakefield;* it is not the intricacies of the story that have made it the delight of the world. Surely human nature must be very much the same when this simple description of a quiet English home went straight to the heart of nations in both hemispheres.

And the wonder is that Goldsmith of all men should have produced such a perfect picture of domestic life. What had his own life been but a moving about between garret and tavern, between bachelor's lodgings and clubs? Where had he seen—unless, indeed, he looked back through the mist of years to the scenes of his childhood—all this gentle government, and wise blindness; all this affection, and consideration, and respect? There is as much human nature in the character of the Vicar alone as would have furnished any fifty of the novels of that day, or of this. Who has not been charmed by his sly and quaint humour, by his moral dignity and simple vanities, even by the little secrets he reveals to us of his paternal rule. "'Ay,' returned I, not knowing well what to think of the matter, 'heaven grant they may be both the better for it this day three months!' This was one of those observations I usually made to impress my wife with an opinion of my sagacity; for if the girls succeeded, then it was a pious wish fulfilled; but if anything unfortunate ensued, then it might be looked on as a prophecy." We know how Miss Olivia was

answered, when, at her mother's prompting, she set up for being well skilled in controversy :—

"'Why, my dear, what controversy can she have read?' cried I. 'It does not occur to me that I ever put such books into her hands : you certainly overrate her merit.'—'Indeed, papa,' replied Olivia, 'she does not ; I have read a great deal of controversy. I have read the disputes between Thwackum and Square ; the controversy between Robinson Crusoe and Friday, the savage ; and I am now employed in reading the controversy in Religious Courtship.'—'Very well,' cried I, 'that's a good girl ; I find you are perfectly qualified for making converts, and so go help your mother to make the gooseberry pie.'"

It is with a great gentleness that the good man reminds his wife and daughters that, after their sudden loss of fortune, it does not become them to wear much finery. "The first Sunday, in particular, their behaviour served to mortify me. I had desired my girls the preceding night to be dressed early the next day ; for I always loved to be at church a good while before the rest of the congregation. They punctually obeyed my directions ; but when we were to assemble in the morning at breakfast, down came my wife and daughters, dressed out in all their former splendour ; their hair plastered up with pomatum, their faces patched to taste, their trains bundled up in a heap behind, and rustling at every motion. I could not help smiling at their vanity, particularly that of my wife, from whom I expected more discretion. In this exigence, therefore, my only resource was to order my son, with an important air, to call our coach. The girls were amazed

at the command; but I repeated it with more solemnity than before. 'Surely, my dear, you jest,' cried my wife; 'we can walk it perfectly well: we want no coach to carry us now.'—'You mistake, child,' returned I, 'we do want a coach; for if we walk to church in this trim, the very children in the parish will hoot after us.'—'Indeed,' replied my wife, 'I always imagined that my Charles was fond of seeing his children neat and handsome about him.'—'You may be as neat as you please,' interrupted I, 'and I shall love you the better for it; but all this is not neatness, but frippery. These rufflings, and pinkings, and patchings will only make us hated by all the wives of our neighbours. No, my children,' continued I, more gravely, 'those gowns may be altered into something of a plainer cut; for finery is very unbecoming in us, who want the means of decency. I do not know whether such flouncing and shredding is becoming even in the rich, if we consider, upon a moderate calculation, that the nakedness of the indigent world might be clothed from the trimmings of the vain.'

"This remonstrance had the proper effect: they went with great composure, that very instant, to change their dress; and the next day I had the satisfaction of finding my daughters, at their own request, employed in cutting up their trains into Sunday waistcoats for Dick and Bill, the two little ones; and, what was still more satisfactory, the gowns seemed improved by this curtailing." And again when he discovered the two girls making a wash for their faces:—"My daughters seemed equally busy with the rest; and I observed them for a good while cooking something over the fire. I at first

supposed they were assisting their mother, but little Dick informed me, in a whisper, that they were making a wash for the face. Washes of all kinds I had a natural antipathy to; for I knew that, instead of mending the complexion, they spoil it. I therefore approached my chair by sly degrees to the fire, and grasping the poker, as if it wanted mending, seemingly by accident overturned the whole composition, and it was too late to begin another."

All this is done with such a light, homely touch, that one gets familiarly to know these people without being aware of it. There is no insistance. There is no dragging you along by the collar; confronting you with certain figures; and compelling you to look at this and study that. The artist stands by you, and laughs in his quiet way; and you are laughing too, when suddenly you find that human beings have silently come into the void before you; and you know them for friends; and even after the vision has faded away, and the beautiful light and colour and glory of romance-land have vanished, you cannot forget them. They have become part of your life; you will take them to the grave with you.

The story, as every one perceives, has its obvious blemishes. "There are an hundred faults in this Thing," says Goldsmith himself, in the prefixed Advertisement. But more particularly, in the midst of all the impossibilities taking place in and around the jail, when that chameleon-like *deus ex machinâ*, Mr. Jenkinson, winds up the tale in hot haste, Goldsmith pauses to put in a sort of apology. "Nor can I go on without a reflection," he says gravely, "on those accidental meetings, which,

though they happen every day, seldom excite our surprise but upon some extraordinary occasion. To what a fortuitous concurrence do we not owe every pleasure and convenience of our lives! How many seeming accidents must unite before we can be clothed or fed! The peasant must be disposed to labour, the shower must fall, the wind fill the merchant's sail, or numbers must want the usual supply." This is Mr. Thackeray's "simple rogue" appearing again in adult life. Certainly, if our supply of food and clothing depended on such accidents as happened to make the Vicar's family happy all at once, there would be a good deal of shivering and starvation in the world. Moreover it may be admitted that on occasion Goldsmith's fine instinct deserts him; and even in describing those domestic relations which are the charm of the novel, he blunders into the unnatural. When Mr. Burchell, for example, leaves the house in consequence of a quarrel with Mrs. Primrose, the Vicar questions his daughter as to whether she had received from that poor gentleman any testimony of his affection for her. She replies No; but remembers to have heard him remark that he never knew a woman who could find merit in a man that was poor. "Such, my dear," continued the Vicar, "is the common cant of all the unfortunate or idle. But I hope you have been taught to judge properly of such men, and that it would be even madness to expect happiness from one who has been so very bad an economist of his own. Your mother and I have now better prospects for you. The next winter, which you will probably spend in town, will give you opportunities of making a more prudent choice." Now it is not at

all likely that a father, however anxious to have his daughter well married and settled, would ask her so delicate a question in open domestic circle, and would then publicly inform her that she was expected to choose a husband on her forthcoming visit to town.

Whatever may be said about any particular incident like this, the atmosphere of the book is true. Goethe, to whom a German translation of the *Vicar* was read by Herder some four years after the publication in England, not only declared it at the time to be one of the best novels ever written, but again and again throughout his life reverted to the charm and delight with which he had made the acquaintance of the English "prose-idyll," and took it for granted that it was a real picture of English life. Despite all the machinery of Mr. Jenkinson's schemes, who could doubt it? Again and again there are recurrent strokes of such vividness and naturalness that we yield altogether to the necromancer. Look at this perfect picture—of human emotion and outside nature—put in in a few sentences. The old clergyman, after being in search of his daughter, has found her, and is now—having left her in an inn—returning to his family and his home. "And now my heart caught new sensations of pleasure, the nearer I approached that peaceful mansion. As a bird that had been frighted from its nest, my affections outwent my haste, and hovered round my little fireside with all the rapture of expectation. I called up the many fond things I had to say, and anticipated the welcome I was to receive. I already felt my wife's tender embrace, and smiled at the joy of my little ones. As I walked but slowly, the night waned apace. The labourers of the day were all

retired to rest; the lights were out in every cottage; no sounds were heard but of the shrilling cock, and the deep-mouthed watch-dog at hollow distance. I approached my little abode of pleasure, and, before I was within a furlong of the place, our honest mastiff came running to welcome me." "*The deep-mouthed watch-dog at hollow distance;*"—what more perfect description of the stillness of night was ever given?

And then there are other qualities in this delightful *Vicar of Wakefield* than merely idyllic tenderness, and pathos, and sly humour. There is a firm presentation of the crimes and brutalities of the world. The pure light that shines within that domestic circle is all the brighter because of the black outer ring that is here and there indicated rather than described. How could we appreciate all the simplicities of the good man's household, but for the rogueries with which they are brought in contact? And although we laugh at Moses and his gross of green spectacles, and the manner in which the Vicar's wife and daughter are imposed on by Miss Wilhelmina Skeggs and Lady Blarney, with their lords and ladies and their tributes to virtue, there is no laughter demanded of us when we find the simplicity and moral dignity of the Vicar meeting and beating the jeers and taunts of the abandoned wretches in the prison. This is really a remarkable episode. The author was under the obvious temptation to make much comic material out of the situation; while another temptation, towards the goody-goody side, was not far off. But the Vicar undertakes the duty of reclaiming these castaways with a modest patience and earnestness in every way in keeping with his character; while they, on the other

hand, are not too easily moved to tears of repentance. His first efforts, it will be remembered, were not too successful. "Their insensibility excited my highest compassion, and blotted my own uneasiness from my mind. It even appeared a duty incumbent upon me to attempt to reclaim them. I resolved, therefore, once more to return, and, in spite of their contempt, to give them my advice, and conquer them by my perseverance. Going, therefore, among them again, I informed Mr. Jenkinson of my design, at which he laughed heartily, but communicated it to the rest. The proposal was received with the greatest good humour, as it promised to afford a new fund of entertainment to persons who had now no other resource for mirth but what could be derived from ridicule or debauchery.

"I therefore read them a portion of the service with a loud, unaffected voice, and found my audience perfectly merry upon the occasion. Lewd whispers, groans of contrition burlesqued, winking and coughing, alternately excited laughter. However, I continued with my natural solemnity to read on, sensible that what I did might mend some, but could itself receive no contamination from any.

"After reading, I entered upon my exhortation, which was rather calculated at first to amuse them than to reprove. I previously observed, that no other motive but their welfare could induce me to this; that I was their fellow-prisoner, and now got nothing by preaching. I was sorry, I said, to hear them so very profane; because they got nothing by it, but might lose a great deal: 'For be assured, my friends,' cried I,—'for you are my friends, however the world may disclaim your friendship,

—though you swore twelve thousand oaths in a day, it would not put one penny in your purse. Then what signifies calling every moment upon the devil, and courting his friendship, since you find how scurvily he uses you? He has given you nothing here, you find, but a mouthful of oaths and an empty belly; and, by the best accounts I have of him, he will give you nothing that's good hereafter.

"'If used ill in our dealings with one man, we naturally go elsewhere. Were it not worth your while, then, just to try how you may like the usage of another master, who gives you fair promises at least to come to him? Surely, my friends, of all stupidity in the world, his must be the greatest, who, after robbing a house, runs to the thief-takers for protection. And yet, how are you more wise? You are all seeking comfort from one that has already betrayed you, applying to a more malicious being than any thief-taker of them all; for they only decoy and then hang you; but he decoys and hangs, and, what is worst of all, will not let you loose after the hangman has done.'

"When I had concluded, I received the compliments of my audience, some of whom came and shook me by the hand, swearing that I was a very honest fellow, and that they desired my further acquaintance. I therefore promised to repeat my lecture next day, and actually conceived some hopes of making a reformation here; for it had ever been my opinion, that no man was past the hour of amendment, every heart lying open to the shafts of reproof, if the archer could but take a proper aim."

His wife and children, naturally dissuading him from an effort which seemed to them only to bring ridicule

upon him, are met by a grave rebuke; and on the next morning he descends to the common prison, where, he says, he found the prisoners very merry, expecting his arrival, and each prepared to play some gaol-trick on the Doctor.

"There was one whose trick gave more universal pleasure than all the rest; for, observing the manner in which I had disposed my books on the table before me, he very dexterously displaced one of them, and put an obscene jest-book of his own in the place. However, I took no notice of all that this mischievous group of little beings could do, but went on, perfectly sensible that what was ridiculous in my attempt would excite mirth only the first or second time, while what was serious would be permanent. My design succeeded, and in less than six days some were penitent, and all attentive.

"It was now that I applauded my perseverance and address, at thus giving sensibility to wretches divested of every moral feeling, and now began to think of doing them temporal services also, by rendering their situation somewhat more comfortable. Their time had hitherto been divided between famine and excess, tumultuous riot and bitter repining. Their only employment was quarrelling among each other, playing at cribbage, and cutting tobacco stoppers. From this last mode of idle industry I took the hint of setting such as choose to work at cutting pegs for tobacconists and shoemakers, the proper wood being bought by a general subscription, and, when manufactured, sold by my appointment; so that each earned something every day—a trifle indeed, but sufficient to maintain him.

"I did not stop here, but instituted fines for the punish-

ment of immorality, and rewards for peculiar industry. Thus, in less than a fortnight I had formed them into something social and humane, and had the pleasure of regarding myself as a legislator who had brought men from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience."

Of course, all this about gaols and thieves was calculated to shock the nerves of those who liked their literature perfumed with rose-water. Madame Riccoboni, to whom Burke had sent the book, wrote to Garrick, "Le plaidoyer en faveur des voleurs, des petits larrons, des gens de mauvaises mœurs, est fort éloigné de me plaire." Others, no doubt, considered the introduction of Miss Skeggs and Lady Blarney as "vastly low." But the curious thing is that the literary critics of the day seem to have been altogether silent about the book—perhaps they were "puzzled" by it, as Southey has suggested. Mr. Forster, who took the trouble to search the periodical literature of the time, says that, "apart from bald recitals of the plot, not a word was said in the way of criticism about the book, either in praise or blame." The *St. James's Chronicle* did not condescend to notice its appearance, and the *Monthly Review* confessed frankly that nothing was to be made of it. The better sort of newspapers, as well as the more dignified reviews, contemptuously left it to the patronage of *Lloyd's Evening Post*, the *London Chronicle*, and journals of that class; which simply informed their readers that a new novel, called the *Vicar of Wakefield*, had been published, that "the editor is Doctor Goldsmith, who has affixed his name to an introductory Advertisement, and that such and such were the incidents of the story." Even his friends, with the excep-

tion of Burke, did not seem to consider that any remarkable new birth in literature had occurred; and it is probable that this was a still greater disappointment to Goldsmith, who was so anxious to be thought well of at the Club. However, the public took to the story. A second edition was published in May; a third in August. Goldsmith, it is true, received no pecuniary gain from this success, for, as we have seen, Johnson had sold the novel outright to Francis Newbery; but his name was growing in importance with the booksellers.

There was need that it should, for his increasing expenses—his fine clothes, his suppers, his whist at the Devil Tavern—were involving him in deeper and deeper difficulties. How was he to extricate himself?—or rather the question that would naturally occur to Goldsmith was how was he to continue that hand-to-mouth existence that had its compensations along with its troubles? Novels like the *Vicar of Wakefield* are not written at a moment's notice, even though any Newbery, judging by results, is willing to double that £60 which Johnson considered to be a fair price for the story at the time. There was the usual resource of hack-writing; and, no doubt, Goldsmith was compelled to fall back on that, if only to keep the elder Newbery, in whose debt he was, in a good humour. But the author of the *Vicar of Wakefield* may be excused if he looked round to see if there was not some more profitable work for him to turn his hand to It was at this time that he began to think of writing a comedy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOOD-NATURED MAN.

Amid much miscellaneous work, mostly of the compilation order, the play of the *Good-natured Man* began to assume concrete form; insomuch that Johnson, always the friend of this erratic Irishman, had promised to write a Prologue for it. It is with regard to this Prologue that Boswell tells a foolish and untrustworthy story about Goldsmith. Dr. Johnson had recently been honoured by an interview with his Sovereign; and the members of the Club were in the habit of flattering him by begging for a repetition of his account of that famous event. On one occasion, during this recital, Boswell relates, Goldsmith "remained unmoved upon a sofa at some distance, affecting not to join in the least in the eager curiosity of the company. He assigned as a reason for his gloom and seeming inattention that he apprehended Johnson had relinquished his purpose of furnishing him with a Prologue to his play, with the hopes of which he had been flattered; but it was strongly suspected that he was fretting with chagrin and envy at the singular honour Doctor Johnson had lately enjoyed. At length the frankness and simplicity

of his natural character prevailed. He sprang from the sofa, advanced to Johnson, and, in a kind of flutter, from imagining himself in the situation which he had just been hearing described, exclaimed, 'Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done; for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it.'" It is obvious enough that the only part of this anecdote which is quite worthy of credence is the actual phrase used by Goldsmith, which is full of his customary generosity and self-depreciation. All those "suspicions" of his envy of his friend may safely be discarded, for they are mere guesswork; even though it might have been natural enough for a man like Goldsmith, conscious of his singular and original genius, to measure himself against Johnson, who was merely a man of keen perception and shrewd reasoning, and to compare the deference paid to Johnson with the scant courtesy shown to himself.

As a matter of fact, the Prologue was written by Dr. Johnson; and the now complete comedy was, after some little arrangement of personal differences between Goldsmith and Garrick, very kindly undertaken by Reynolds, submitted for Garrick's approval. But nothing came of Reynolds's intervention. Perhaps Goldsmith resented Garrick's airs of patronage towards a poor devil of an author; perhaps Garrick was surprised by the manner in which well-intentioned criticisms were taken; at all events, after a good deal of shilly-shallying, the play was taken out of Garrick's hands. Fortunately, a project was just at this moment on foot for starting the rival theatre in Covent Garden,

under the management of George Colman; and to Colman Goldsmith's play was forthwith consigned. The play was accepted; but it was a long time before it was produced; and in that interval it may fairly be presumed the *res angusta domi* of Goldsmith did not become any more free and generous than before. It was in this interval that the elder Newbery died; Goldsmith had one patron the less. Another patron who offered himself was civilly bowed to the door. This is an incident in Goldsmith's career which, like his interview with the Earl of Northumberland, should ever be remembered in his honour. The Government of the day were desirous of enlisting on their behalf the services of writers of somewhat better position than the mere libellers whose pens were the slaves of anybody's purse; and a Mr. Scott, a chaplain of Lord Sandwich, appears to have imagined that it would be be worth while to buy Goldsmith. He applied to Goldsmith in due course; and this is an account of the interview. "I found him in a miserable set of chambers in the Temple. I told him my authority; I told him I was empowered to pay most liberally for his exertions; and, would you believe it! he was so absurd as to say, 'I can earn as much as will supply my wants without writing for any party; the assistance you offer is therefore unnecessary to me.' And I left him in his garret." Needy as he was, Goldsmith had too much self-respect to become a paid libeller and cutthroat of public reputations.

On the evening of Friday, the 29th of January, 1768, when Goldsmith had now reached the age of forty, the comedy of *The Good-natured Man* was produced at

Covent Garden Theatre. The Prologue had, according to promise, been written by Johnson; and a very singular prologue it was. Even Boswell was struck by the odd contrast between this sonorous piece of melancholy and the fun that was to follow. "The first lines of this Prologue," he conscientiously remarks, "are strongly characteristical of the dismal gloom of his mind; which, in his case, as in the case of all who are distressed with the same malady of imagination, transfers to others its own feelings. Who could suppose it was to introduce a comedy, when Mr. Bensley solemnly began—

> "'Pressed with the load of life, the weary mind
> Surveys the general toil of humankind'?

But this dark ground might make Goldsmith's humour shine the more." When we come to the comedy itself, we find but little bright humour in the opening passages. The author is obviously timid, anxious, and constrained. There is nothing of the brisk, confident vivacity with which *She Stoops to Conquer* opens. The novice does not yet understand the art of making his characters explain themselves; and accordingly the benevolent uncle and honest Jarvis indulge in a conversation which, laboriously descriptive of the character of young Honeywood, is spoken "at" the audience. With the entrance of young Honeywood himself, Goldsmith endeavours to become a little more sprightly; but there is still anxiety hanging over him, and the epigrams are little more than merely formal antitheses.

"*Jarvis.* This bill from your tailor; this from your mercer; and this from the little broker in Crooked Lane. He says he

has been at a great deal of trouble to get back the money you borrowed.

Hon. That I don't know; but I'm sure we were at a great deal of trouble in getting him to lend it.

Jar. He has lost all patience.

Hon. Then he has lost a very good thing.

Jar. There's that ten guineas you were sending to the poor gentleman and his children in the Fleet. I believe that would stop his mouth for a while at least.

Hon. Ay, Jarvis, but what will fill their mouths in the mean time?"

This young Honeywood, the hero of the play, is, and remains throughout, a somewhat ghostly personage. He has attributes; but no flesh or blood. There is much more substance in the next character introduced—the inimitable Croaker, who revels in evil forebodings and drinks deep of the luxury of woe. These are the two chief characters; but then a play must have a plot. And perhaps it would not be fair, so far as the plot is concerned, to judge of *The Good-natured Man* merely as a literary production. Intricacies that seem tedious and puzzling on paper appear to be clear enough on the stage: it is much more easy to remember the history and circumstances of a person whom we see before us, than to attach these to a mere name—especially as the name is sure to be clipped down from *Honeywood* to *Hon.* and from *Leontine* to *Leon.* However, it is in the midst of all the cross-purposes of the lovers that we once more come upon our old friend Beau Tibbs—though Mr. Tibbs is now in much better circumstances, and has been re-named by his creator Jack Lofty. Garrick had objected to the introduction of Jack, on the ground that he was only a distraction. But Goldsmith, whether

in writing a novel or a play, was more anxious to represent human nature than to prune a plot, and paid but little respect to the unities, if only he could arouse our interest. And who is not delighted with this Jack Lofty and his "duchessy" talk—his airs of patronage, his mysterious hints, his gay familiarity with the great, his audacious lying?

"*Lofty.* Waller? Waller? Is he of the house?

Mrs. Croaker. The modern poet of that name, sir.

Lof. Oh, a modern! We men of business despise the moderns; and as for the ancients, we have no time to read them. Poetry is a pretty thing enough for our wives and daughters; but not for us. Why now, here I stand that know nothing of books. I say, madam, I know nothing of books; and yet, I believe, upon a land-carriage fishery, a stamp act, or a jag-hire, I can talk my two hours without feeling the want of them.

Mrs. Cro. The world is no stranger to Mr. Lofty's eminence in every capacity.

Lof. I vow to gad, madam, you make me blush. I'm nothing, nothing, nothing in the world; a mere obscure gentleman. To be sure, indeed, one or two of the present ministers are pleased to represent me as a formidable man. I know they are pleased to bespatter me at all their little dirty levees. Yet, upon my soul, I wonder what they see in me to treat me so! Measures, not men, have always been my mark; and I vow, by all that's honourable, my resentment has never done the men, as mere men, any manner of harm—that is, as mere men.

Mrs. Cro. What importance, and yet what modesty!

Lof. Oh, if you talk of modesty, madam, there, I own, I'm accessible to praise: modesty is my foible: it was so the Duke of Brentford used to say of me. 'I love Jack Lofty,' he used to say: 'no man has a finer knowledge of things; quite a man of information; and when he speaks upon his

legs, by the Lord he's prodigious, he scouts them; and yet all men have their faults; too much modesty is his,' says his grace.

Mrs. Cro. And yet, I dare say, you don't want assurance when you come to solicit for your friends.

Lof. Oh, there indeed I'm in bronze. Apropos! I have just been mentioning Miss Richland's case to a certain personage; we must name no names. When I ask, I am not to be put off, madam. No, no, I take my friend by the button. A fine girl, sir; great justice in her case. A friend of mine —borough interest—business must be done, Mr. Secretary.— I say, Mr. Secretary, her business must be done, sir. That's my way, madam.

Mrs. Cro. Bless me! you said all this to the Secretary of State, did you?

Lof. I did not say the Secretary, did I? Well, curse it, since you have found me out, I will not deny it. It was to the Secretary."

Strangely enough, what may now seem to some of us the very best scene in the *Good-natured Man*—the scene, that is, in which young Honeywood, suddenly finding Miss Richland without, is compelled to dress up the two bailiffs in possession of his house and introduce them to her as gentlemen friends—was very nearly damning the play on the first night of its production. The pit was of opinion that it was "low;" and subsequently the critics took up the cry, and professed themselves to be so deeply shocked by the vulgar humours of the bailiffs that Goldsmith had to cut them out. But on the opening night the anxious author, who had been rendered nearly distracted by the cries and hisses produced by this scene, was somewhat reassured when the audience began to laugh again over the tribulations of Mr. Croaker. To the actor who played the part he expressed

his warm gratitude when the piece was over; assuring him that he had exceeded his own conception of the character, and that "the fine comic richness of his colouring made it almost appear as new to him as to any other person in the house."

The new play had been on the whole favourably received; and, when Goldsmith went along afterwards to the Club, his companions were doubtless not at all surprised to find him in good spirits. He was even merrier than usual; and consented to sing his favourite ballad about the Old Woman tossed in a Blanket. But those hisses and cries were still rankling in his memory; and he himself subsequently confessed that he was "suffering horrid tortures." Nay, when the other members of the Club had gone, leaving him and Johnson together, he "burst out a-crying, and even swore by —— that he would never write again." When Goldsmith told this story in after-days, Johnson was naturally astonished; perhaps—himself not suffering much from an excessive sensitiveness—he may have attributed that little burst of hysterical emotion to the excitement of the evening increased by a glass or two of punch, and determined therefore never to mention it. "All which, Doctor," he said, "I thought had been a secret between you and me; and I am sure I would not have said anything about it for the world." Indeed there was little to cry over, either in the first reception of the piece or in its subsequent fate. With the offending bailiffs cut out, the comedy would seem to have been very fairly successful. The proceeds of three of the evenings were Goldsmith's payment; and in this manner he received £400. Then Griffin published the play; and from this

source Goldsmith received an additional £100; so that altogether he was very well paid for his work. Moreover he had appealed against the judgment of the pit and the dramatic critics, by printing in the published edition the bailiff scene which had been removed from the stage; and the *Monthly Review* was so extremely kind as to say that "the bailiff and his blackguard follower appeared intolerable on the stage, yet we are not disgusted with them in the perusal." Perhaps we have grown less scrupulous since then; but at all events it would be difficult for anybody nowadays to find anything but good-natured fun in that famous scene. There is an occasional "damn," it is true; but then English officers have always been permitted that little playfulness, and these two gentlemen were supposed to "serve in the Fleet;" while if they had been particularly refined in their speech and manner, how could the author have aroused Miss Richland's suspicions? It is possible that the two actors who played the bailiff and his follower may have introduced some vulgar "gag" into their parts; but there is no warranty for anything of the kind in the play as we now read it.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLDSMITH IN SOCIETY.

The appearance of the *Good-natured Man* ushered in a halcyon period in Goldsmith's life. The *Traveller* and the *Vicar* had gained for him only reputation: this new comedy put £500 in his pocket. Of course that was too big a sum for Goldsmith to have about him long. Four-fifths of it he immediately expended on the purchase and decoration of a set of chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple; with the remainder he appears to have begun a series of entertainments in this new abode, which were perhaps more remarkable for their mirth than their decorum. There was no sort of frolic in which Goldsmith would not indulge for the amusement of his guests; he would sing them songs; he would throw his wig to the ceiling; he would dance a minuet. And then they had cards, forfeits, blind-man's-buff, until Mr. Blackstone, then engaged on his *Commentaries* in the rooms below, was driven nearly mad by the uproar. These parties would seem to have been of a most nondescript character—chance gatherings of any obscure authors or actors whom he happened to meet; but from time to time there were more formal enter-

tainments, at which Johnson, Percy, and similar distinguished persons were present. Moreover, Dr. Goldsmith himself was much asked out to dinner too; and so, not content with the "Tyrian bloom, satin grain and garter, blue-silk breeches," which Mr. Filby had provided for the evening of the production of the comedy, he now had another suit "lined with silk, and gold buttons," that he might appear in proper guise. Then he had his airs of consequence too. This was his answer to an invitation from Kelly, who was his rival of the hour: "I would with pleasure accept your kind invitation, but to tell you the truth, my dear boy, my *Traveller* has found me a home in so many places, that I am engaged, I believe, three days. Let me see. To-day I dine with Edmund Burke, to-morrow with Dr. Nugent, and the next day with Topham Beauclerc; but I'll tell you what I'll do for you, I'll dine with you on Saturday." Kelly told this story as against Goldsmith; but surely there is not so much ostentation in the reply. Directly after *Tristram Shandy* was published, Sterne found himself fourteen deep in dinner engagements: why should not the author of the *Traveller* and the *Vicar* and the *Good-natured Man* have his engagements also? And perhaps it was but right that Mr. Kelly, who was after all only a critic and scribbler, though he had written a play which was for the moment enjoying an undeserved popularity, should be given to understand that Dr. Goldsmith was not to be asked to a hole-and-corner chop at a moment's notice. To-day he dines with Mr. Burke; to-morrow with Dr. Nugent; the day after with Mr. Beauclerc. If you wish to have the honour of his company, you may choose a day after

that; and then, with his new wig, with his coat of Tyrian bloom and blue silk breeches, with a smart sword at his side, his gold-headed cane in his hand, and his hat under his elbow, he will present himself in due course. Dr. Goldsmith is announced, and makes his grave bow: this is the man of genius about whom all the town is talking; the friend of Burke, of Reynolds, of Johnson, of Hogarth; this is not the ragged Irishman who was some time ago earning a crust by running errands for an apothecary.

Goldsmith's grand airs, however, were assumed but seldom; and they never imposed on anybody. His acquaintances treated him with a familiarity which testified rather to his good-nature than to their good taste. Now and again, indeed, he was prompted to resent this familiarity; but the effort was not successful. In the "high jinks" to which he good-humouredly resorted for the entertainment of his guests he permitted a freedom which it was afterwards not very easy to discard; and as he was always ready to make a butt of himself for the amusement of his friends and acquaintances, it came to be recognised that anybody was allowed to play off a joke on "Goldy." The jokes, such of them as have been put on record, are of the poorest sort. The horse-collar is never far off. One gladly turns from these dismal humours of the tavern and the club to the picture of Goldsmith's enjoying what he called a "Shoemaker's Holiday" in the company of one or two chosen intimates. Goldsmith, baited and bothered by the wits of a public-house, became a different being when he had assumed the guidance of a small party of chosen friends bent on having a day's frugal pleasure. We are indebted

to one Cooke, a neighbour of Goldsmith's in the Temple, not only for a most interesting description of one of those shoemaker's holidays, but also for the knowledge that Goldsmith had even now begun writing the *Deserted Village*, which was not published till 1770, two years later. Goldsmith, though he could turn out plenty of manufactured stuff for the booksellers, worked slowly at the special story or poem with which he meant to "strike for honest fame." This Mr. Cooke, calling on him one morning, discovered that Goldsmith had that day written these ten lines of the *Deserted Village* :—

> "Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
> Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
> How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
> Where humble happiness endeared each scene!
> How often have I paused on every charm,
> The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
> The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
> The decent church, that topt the neighbouring hill,
> The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
> For talking age and whispering lovers made!"

"Come," said he, "let me tell you this is no bad morning's work; and now, my dear boy, if you are not better engaged, I should be glad to enjoy a shoemaker's holiday with you." "A shoemaker's holiday," continues the writer of these reminiscences, "was a day of great festivity to poor Goldsmith, and was spent in the following innocent manner. Three or four of his intimate friends rendezvoused at his chambers to breakfast about ten o'clock in the morning; at eleven they proceeded by the City Road and through the fields

to Highbury Barn to dinner; about six o'clock in the evening they adjourned to White Conduit House to drink tea; and concluded by supping at the Grecian or Temple Exchange coffee-house or at the Globe in Fleet Street. There was a very good ordinary of two dishes and pastry kept at Highbury Barn about this time at tenpence per head, including a penny to the waiter; and the company generally consisted of literary characters, a few Templars, and some citizens who had left off trade. The whole expenses of the day's fete never exceeded a crown, and oftener were from three-and-sixpence to four shillings; for which the party obtained good air and exercise, good living, the example of simple manners, and good conversation."

It would have been well indeed for Goldsmith had he been possessed of sufficient strength of character to remain satisfied with these simple pleasures, and to have lived the quiet and modest life of a man of letters on such income as he could derive from the best work he could produce. But it is this same Mr. Cooke who gives decisive testimony as to Goldsmith's increasing desire to "shine" by imitating the expenditure of the great; the natural consequence of which was that he only plunged himself into a morass of debt, advances, contracts for hack-work, and misery. "His debts rendered him at times so melancholy and dejected, that I am sure he felt himself a very unhappy man." Perhaps it was with some sudden resolve to flee from temptation, and grapple with the difficulties that beset him, that he, in conjunction with another Temple neighbour, Mr. Bott, rented a cottage some eight miles down the Edgware Road; and here he set to work on the *History of Rome*,

which he was writing for Davies. Apart from this hack-work, now rendered necessary by his debt, it is probable that one strong inducement leading him to this occasional seclusion was the progress he might be able to make with the *Deserted Village*. Amid all his town gaieties and country excursions, amid his dinners and suppers and dances, his borrowings, and contracts, and the hurried literary produce of the moment, he never forgot what was due to his reputation as an English poet. The journalistic bullies of the day might vent their spleen and envy on him; his best friends might smile at his conversational failures; the wits of the tavern might put up the horse-collar as before; but at least he had the consolation of his art. No one better knew than himself the value of those finished and musical lines he was gradually adding to the beautiful poem, the grace, and sweetness, and tender, pathetic charm of which make it one of the literary treasures of the English people.

The sorrows of debt were not Goldsmith's only trouble at this time. For some reason or other he seems to have become the especial object of spiteful attack on the part of the literary cut-throats of the day. And Goldsmith, though he might listen with respect to the wise advice of Johnson on such matters, was never able to cultivate Johnson's habit of absolute indifference to anything that might be said or sung of him. "The Kenricks, Campbells, MacNicols, and Hendersons," says Lord Macaulay—speaking of Johnson, "did their best to annoy him, in the hope that he would give them importance by answering them. But the reader will in vain search his works for any allusion to Kenrick or

Campbell, to MacNicol or Henderson. One Scotchman, bent on vindicating the fame of Scotch learning, defied him to the combat in a detestable Latin hexameter—

'Maxime, si tu vis, cupio contendere tecum.'

But Johnson took no notice of the challenge. He had learned, both from his own observation and from literary history, in which he was deeply read, that the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and that an author whose works are likely to live, is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die. He always maintained that fame was a shuttlecock which could be kept up only by being beaten back, as well as beaten forward, and which would soon fall if there were only one battledore. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apophthegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself."

It was not given to Goldsmith to feel "like the Monument" on any occasion whatsoever. He was anxious to have the esteem of his friends; he was sensitive to a degree; denunciation or malice, begotten of envy that Johnson would have passed unheeded, wounded him to the quick. "The insults to which he had to submit," Thackeray wrote with a quick and warm sympathy, "are shocking to read of—slander, contumely, vulgar satire, brutal malignity perverting his commonest motives and actions: he had his share of these, and one's anger is roused at reading of them, as it is at seeing a woman insulted or a child assaulted,

at the notion that a creature so very gentle, and weak, and full of love should have had to suffer so." Goldsmith's revenge, his defence of himself, his appeal to the public, were the *Traveller*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the *Deserted Village;* but these came at long intervals; and in the meantime he had to bear with the anonymous malignity that pursued him as best he might. No doubt, when Burke was entertaining him at dinner; and when Johnson was openly deferring to him in conversation at the Club; and when Reynolds was painting his portrait, he could afford to forget Mr. Kenrick and the rest of the libelling clan.

The occasions on which Johnson deferred to Goldsmith in conversation were no doubt few; but at all events the bludgeon of the great Cham would appear to have come down less frequently on "honest Goldy" than on the other members of that famous coterie. It could come down heavily enough. "Sir," said an incautious person, "drinking drives away care, and makes us forget whatever is disagreeable. Would not you allow a man to drink for that reason?" "Yes, sir," was the reply, "if he sat next *you*." Johnson, however, was considerate towards Goldsmith, partly because of his affection for him, and partly because he saw under what disadvantages Goldsmith entered the lists. For one thing, the conversation of those evenings would seem to have drifted continually into the mere definition of phrases. Now Johnson had spent years of his life, during the compilation of his Dictionary, in doing nothing else but defining; and, whenever the dispute took a phraseological turn, he had it all his own way. Goldsmith, on the other hand, was apt to become confused in his eager

self-consciousness. "Goldsmith," said Johnson to Boswell, "should not be for ever attempting to shine in conversation; he has not temper for it, he is so much mortified when he fails. . . When he contends, if he gets the better, it is a very little addition to a man of his literary reputation: if he does not get the better, he is miserably vexed." Boswell, nevertheless, admits that Goldsmith was "often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself," and goes on to tell how Goldsmith, relating the fable of the little fishes who petitioned Jupiter, and perceiving that Johnson was laughing at him, immediately said, "Why, Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think; for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like WHALES." Who but Goldsmith would have dared to play jokes on the sage? At supper they have rumps and kidneys. The sage expresses his approval of "the pretty little things;" but profoundly observes that one must eat a good many of them before being satisfied. "Ay, but how many of them," asks Goldsmith, "would reach to the moon?" The sage professes his ignorance; and, indeed, remarks that that would exceed even Goldsmith's calculations; when the practical joker observes, "Why, *one*, sir, if it were long enough." Johnson was completely beaten on this occasion. "Well, sir, I have deserved it. I should not have provoked so foolish an answer by so foolish a question."

It was Johnson himself, moreover, who told the story of Goldsmith and himself being in Poets' Corner; of his saying to Goldsmith

"Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis,"

and of Goldsmith subsequently repeating the quotation when, having walked towards Fleet Street, they were confronted by the heads on Temple Bar. Even when Goldsmith was opinionated and wrong, Johnson's contradiction was in a manner gentle. "If you put a tub full of blood into a stable, the horses are like to go mad," observed Goldsmith. "I doubt that," was Johnson's reply. "Nay, sir, it is a fact well authenticated." Here Thrale interposed to suggest that Goldsmith should have the experiment tried in the stable; but Johnson merely said that, if Goldsmith began making these experiments, he would never get his book written at all. Occasionally, of course, Goldsmith was tossed and gored just like another. "But, sir," he had ventured to say, in opposition to Johnson, "when people live together who have something as to which they disagree, and which they want to shun, they will be in the situation mentioned in the story of Bluebeard, 'You may look into all the chambers but one.' But we should have the greatest inclination to look into that chamber, to talk of that subject." Here, according to Boswell, Johnson answered in a loud voice, "Sir, I am not saying that *you* could live in friendship with a man from whom you differ as to one point; I am only saying that *I* could do it." But then again he could easily obtain pardon from the gentle Goldsmith for any occasional rudeness. One evening they had a sharp passage of arms at dinner; and thereafter the company adjourned to the Club, where Goldsmith sate silent and depressed. "Johnson perceived this," says Boswell, "and said aside to some of us, 'I'll make Goldsmith forgive me'; and then called to him in a loud voice, 'Dr. Goldsmith, something passed

to-day where you and I dined: I ask your pardon.' Goldsmith answered placidly, 'It must be much from you, sir, that I take ill.' And so at once the difference was over, and they were on as easy terms as ever, and Goldsmith rattled away as usual." For the rest, Johnson was the constant and doughty champion of Goldsmith as a man of letters. He would suffer no one to doubt the power and versatility of that genius which he had been amongst the first to recognise and encourage. "Whether, indeed, we take him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as an historian," he announced to an assemblage of distinguished persons met together at dinner at Mr. Beauclerc's, "*he stands in the first class.*" And there was no one living who dared dispute the verdict—at least in Johnson's hearing.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

But it is time to return to the literary performances that gained for this uncouth Irishman so great an amount of consideration from the first men of his time. The engagement with Griffin about the *History of Animated Nature* was made at the beginning of 1769. The work was to occupy eight volumes; and Dr. Goldsmith was to receive eight hundred guineas for the complete copyright. Whether the undertaking was originally a suggestion of Griffin's, or of Goldsmith's own, does not appear. If it was the author's, it was probably only the first means that occurred to him of getting another advance; and that advance—£500 on account—he did actually get. But if it was the suggestion of the publisher, Griffin must have been a bold man. A writer whose acquaintance with animated nature was such as to allow him to make the "insidious tiger" a denizen of the backwoods of Canada,[1] was not a very safe authority. But perhaps Griffin had consulted Johnson before making this bargain; and we know that Johnson, though continually remarking on Goldsmith's

[1] See *Citizen of the World*, Letter XVII.

extraordinary ignorance of facts, was of opinion that the *History of Animated Nature* would be "as entertaining as a Persian tale." However, Goldsmith—no doubt after he had spent the five hundred guineas—tackled the work in earnest. When Boswell subsequently went out to call on him at another rural retreat he had taken on the Edgware Road, Boswell and Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiad*, found Goldsmith from home; "but, having a curiosity to see his apartment, we went in and found curious scraps of descriptions of animals scrawled upon the wall with a black-lead pencil." Meanwhile, this *Animated Nature* being in hand, the *Roman History* was published, and was very well received by the critics and by the public. "Goldsmith's abridgment," Johnson declared, "is better than that of Lucius Florus or Eutropius; and I will venture to say that if you compare him with Vertot, in the same places of the *Roman History*, you will find that he excels Vertot. Sir, he has the art of compiling, and of saying everything he has to say in a pleasing manner."

So thought the booksellers too; and the success of the *Roman History* only involved him in fresh projects of compilation. By an offer of £500 Davies induced him to lay aside for the moment the *Animated Nature* and begin "An History of England, from the Birth of the British Empire to the death of George the Second, in four volumes octavo." He also about this time undertook to write a Life of Thomas Parnell. Here, indeed, was plenty of work, and work promising good pay; but the depressing thing is that Goldsmith should have been the man who had to do it. He may have done it better than any one else could have done—indeed, looking over

the results of all that drudgery, we recognise now the happy turns of expression which were never long absent from Goldsmith's prose-writing—but the world could well afford to sacrifice all the task-work thus got through for another poem like the *Deserted Village* or the *Traveller*. Perhaps Goldsmith considered he was making a fair compromise when, for the sake of his reputation, he devoted a certain portion of his time to his poetical work, and then, to have money for fine clothes and high jinks, gave the rest to the booksellers. One critic, on the appearance of the *Roman History*, referred to the *Traveller*, and remarked that it was a pity that the "author of one of the best poems that has appeared since those of Mr. Pope, should not apply wholly to works of imagination." We may echo that regret now; but Goldsmith would at the time have no doubt replied that, if he had trusted to his poems, he would never have been able to pay £400 for chambers in the Temple. In fact he said as much to Lord Lisburn at one of the Academy dinners: "I cannot afford to court the draggle-tail muses, my Lord; they would let me starve; but by my other labours I can make shift to eat, and drink, and have good clothes." And there is little use in our regretting now that Goldsmith was not cast in a more heroic mould; we have to take him as he is; and be grateful for what he has left us.

It is a grateful relief to turn from these booksellers' contracts and forced labours to the sweet clear note of singing that one finds in the *Deserted Village*. This poem, after having been repeatedly announced and as often withdrawn for further revision, was at last published on the 26th of May, 1770, when Goldsmith

was in his forty-second year. The leading idea of it he had already thrown out in certain lines in the *Traveller*:—

> "Have we not seen, round Britain's peopled shore,
> Her useful sons exchanged for useless ore?
> Seen all her triumphs but destruction haste,
> Like flaring tapers brightening as they waste?
> Seen opulence, her grandeur to maintain,
> Lead stern depopulation in her train,
> And over fields where scattered hamlets rose
> In barren solitary pomp repose?
> Have we not seen at pleasure's lordly call
> The smiling long-frequented village fall?
> Beheld the duteous son, the sire decayed,
> The modest matron, and the blushing maid,
> Forced from their homes, a melancholy train,
> To traverse climes beyond the western main;
> Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps around,
> And Niagara stuns with thundering sound?"

—and elsewhere, in recorded conversations of his, we find that he had somehow got it into his head that the accumulation of wealth in a country was the parent of all evils, including depopulation. We need not stay here to discuss Goldsmith's position as a political economist; even although Johnson seems to sanction his theory in the four lines he contributed to the end of the poem. Nor is it worth while returning to that objection of Lord Macaulay's which has already been mentioned in these pages, further than to repeat that the poor Irish village in which Goldsmith was brought up, no doubt looked to him as charming as any Auburn, when he regarded it through the softening and beautifying mist

of years. It is enough that the abandonment by a number of poor people of the homes in which they and theirs have lived their lives, is one of the most pathetic facts in our civilisation; and that out of the various circumstances surrounding this forced migration Goldsmith has made one of the most graceful and touching poems in the English language. It is clear bird-singing; but there is a pathetic note in it. That imaginary ramble through the Lissoy that is far away has recalled more than his boyish sports; it has made him look back over his own life—the life of an exile.

> "I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
> Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;
> To husband out life's taper at the close,
> And keep the flame from wasting by repose:
> I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
> Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
> Around my fire an evening group to draw,
> And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;
> And, as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue
> Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
> I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
> Here to return—and die at home at last."

Who can doubt that it was of Lissoy he was thinking? Sir Walter Scott, writing a generation ago, said that "the church which tops the neighbouring hill," the mill and the brook were still to be seen in the Irish village; and that even

> "The hawthorn bush with seats beneath the shade
> For talking age and whispering lovers made,"

had been identified by the indefatigable tourist, and was of course being cut to pieces to make souvenirs. But indeed it is of little consequence whether we say that Auburn is an English village, or insist that it is only Lissoy idealised, as long as the thing is true in itself. And we know that this is true: it is not that one sees the place as a picture, but that one seems to be breathing its very atmosphere, and listening to the various cries that thrill the "hollow silence."

"Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's close
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.
There, as I past with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spake the vacant mind."

Nor is it any romantic and impossible peasantry that is gradually brought before us. There are no Norvals in Lissoy. There is the old woman—Catherine Geraghty, they say, was her name—who gathered cresses in the ditches near her cabin. There is the village preacher whom Mrs Hodson, Goldsmith's sister, took to be a portrait of their father; but whom others have identified as Henry Goldsmith, and even as the uncle Contarine: they may all have contributed. And then comes Paddy Byrne. Amid all the pensive tenderness of the poem this description of the schoolmaster, with its strokes of demure humour, is introduced with delightful effect.

"Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,
With blossom'd furze unprofitably gay,
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was, and stern to view;
I knew him well, and every truant knew:
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
Full well the busy whisper circling round
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault;
The village all declared how much he knew:
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too:
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge:
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill;
For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still;
While words of learned length and thundering sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew."

All this is so simple and natural that we cannot fail to believe in the reality of Auburn, or Lissoy, or whatever the village may be supposed to be. We visit the clergyman's cheerful fireside; and look in on the noisy school; and sit in the evening in the ale-house to listen to the profound politics talked there. But the crisis comes. Auburn *delenda est*. Here, no doubt, occurs the least probable part of the poem. Poverty of soil is a common cause of emigration; land that produces oats (when it can produce oats at all) three-fourths mixed with weeds, and hay chiefly consisting of rushes, naturally

discharges its surplus population as families increase; and though the wrench of parting is painful enough, the usual result is a change from starvation to competence. It more rarely happens that a district of peace and plenty, such as Auburn was supposed to see around it, is depopulated to add to a great man's estate.

> "The man of wealth and pride
> Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
> Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
> Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds:
> ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿
> His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
> Indignant spurns the cottage from the green."

—and so forth. This seldom happens; but it does happen; and it has happened, in our own day, in England. It is within the last twenty years that an English landlord, having faith in his riches, bade a village be removed and cast elsewhere, so that it should no longer be visible from his windows: and it was forthwith removed. But any solitary instance like this is not sufficient to support the theory that wealth and luxury are inimical to the existence of a hardy peasantry; and so we must admit, after all, that it is poetical exigency rather than political economy that has decreed the destruction of the loveliest village of the plain. Where, asks the poet, are the driven poor to find refuge. when even the fenceless commons are seized upon and divided by the rich? In the great cities?—

> "To see profusion that he must not share;
> To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
> To pamper luxury and thin mankind."

It is in this description of a life in cities that there occurs an often-quoted passage, which has in it one of the most perfect lines in English poetry :—

> "Ah, turn thine eyes
> Where the poor houseless shivering female lies.
> She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,
> Has wept at tales of innocence distrest;
> Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
> Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;
> Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,
> Near her betrayer's door she lays her head.
> And, pinch'd with cold, and shrinking from the shower,
> With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,
> When idly first, ambitious of the town,
> She left her wheel and robes of country brown."

Goldsmith wrote in a pre-Wordsworthian age, when, even in the realms of poetry, a primrose was not much more than a primrose; but it is doubtful whether, either before, during, or since Wordsworth's time the sentiment that the imagination can infuse into the common and familiar things around us ever received more happy expression than in the well-known line,

> "*Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn.*"

No one has as yet succeeded in defining accurately and concisely what poetry is; but at all events this line is surcharged with a certain quality which is conspicuously absent in such a production as the *Essay on Man*. Another similar line is to be found further on in the description of the distant scenes to which the proscribed people are driven :

"Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe."

Indeed, the pathetic side of emigration has never been so powerfully presented to us as in this poem—

"When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked their last,
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main,
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.
* * * * * * *
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
Downward they move a melancholy band,
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
Contented toil, and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness are there;
And piety with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty, and faithful love."

And worst of all, in this imaginative departure, we find that Poetry herself is leaving our shores. She is now to try her voice

"On Torno's cliffs or Pambamarca's side;"

and the poet, in the closing lines of the poem, bids her a passionate and tender farewell:—

"And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade;

Unfit in these degenerate times of shame
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride;
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;
Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well!
Farewell, and O! where'er thy voice be tried,
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,
Whether where equinoctial fervours glow,
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
Redress the rigours of the inclement clime;
Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain;
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain:
Teach him, that states of native strength possest,
Though very poor, may still be very blest;
That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,
As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away;
While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky."

So ends this graceful, melodious, tender poem, the position of which in English literature, and in the estimation of all who love English literature, has not been disturbed by any fluctuations of literary fashion. We may give more attention at the moment to the new experiments of the poetic method; but we return only with renewed gratitude to the old familiar strain, not the least merit of which is that it has nothing about it of foreign tricks or graces. In English literature there is nothing more thoroughly English than these writings produced by an Irishman And whether or not it was Paddy Byrne, and Catherine Geraghty, and the Lissoy ale-house that

Goldsmith had in his mind when he was writing the poem, is not of much consequence: the manner and language and feeling are all essentially English; so that we never think of calling Goldsmith anything but an English poet.

The poem met with great and immediate success. Of course everything that Dr. Goldsmith now wrote was read by the public; he had not to wait for the recommendation of the reviews; but, in this case, even the reviews had scarcely anything but praise in the welcome of his new book. It was dedicated, in graceful and ingenious terms, to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who returned the compliment by painting a picture and placing on the engraving of it this inscription: "This attempt to express a character in the *Deserted Village* is dedicated to Dr. Goldsmith by his sincere friend and admirer, Sir Joshua Reynolds." What Goldsmith got from Griffin for the poem is not accurately known; and this is a misfortune, for the knowledge would have enabled us to judge whether at that time it was possible for a poet to court the draggle tail muses without risk of starvation But if fame were his chief object in the composition of the poem, he was sufficiently rewarded; and it is to be surmised that by this time the people in Ireland—no longer implored to get subscribers—had heard of the proud position won by the vagrant youth who had "taken the world for his pillow" some eighteen years before.

That his own thoughts had sometimes wandered back to the scenes and friends of his youth during this labour of love, we know from his letters In January of this year, while as yet the *Deserted*

Village was not quite through the press, he wrote to his brother Maurice; and expressed himself as most anxious to hear all about the relatives from whom he had been so long parted. He has something to say about himself too; wishes it to be known that the King has lately been pleased to make him Professor of Ancient History "in a Royal Academy of Painting which he has just established;" but gives no very flourishing account of his circumstances. "Honours to one in my situation are something like ruffles to a man that wants a shirt." However, there is some small legacy of fourteen or fifteen pounds left him by his uncle Contarine, which he understands to be in the keeping of his cousin Lawder; and to this wealth he is desirous of foregoing all claim: his relations must settle how it may be best expended. But there is not a reference to his literary achievements, or the position won by them; not the slightest yielding to even a pardonable vanity; it is a modest, affectionate letter. The only hint that Maurice Goldsmith receives of the esteem in which his brother is held in London, is contained in a brief mention of Johnson, Burke, and others as his friends. "I have sent my cousin Jenny a miniature picture of myself, as I believe it is the most acceptable present I can offer. I have ordered it to be left for her at George Faulkenor's, folded in a letter. The face, you well know, is ugly enough; but it is finely painted. I will shortly also send my friends over the Shannon some mezzotinto prints of myself, and some more of my friends here, such as Burke, Johnson, Reynolds, and Colman. I believe I have written an hundred letters to different friends in your country, and never received an answer

from any of them. I do not know how to account for this, or why they are unwilling to keep up for me those regards which I must ever retain for them." The letter winds up with an appeal for news, news, news.

CHAPTER XV.

OCCASIONAL WRITINGS.

Some two months after the publication of the *Deserted Village*, when its success had been well assured, Goldsmith proposed to himself the relaxation of a little Continental tour; and he was accompanied by three ladies, Mrs. Horneck and her two pretty daughters, who doubtless took more charge of him than he did of them. This Mrs. Horneck, the widow of a certain Captain Horneck, was connected with Reynolds, while Burke was the guardian of the two girls; so that it was natural that they should make the acquaintance of Dr. Goldsmith. A foolish attempt has been made to weave out of the relations supposed to exist between the younger of the girls and Goldsmith an imaginary romance; but there is not the slightest actual foundation for anything of the kind. Indeed the best guide we can have to the friendly and familiar terms on which he stood with regard to the Hornecks and their circle, is the following careless and jocular reply to a chance invitation sent him by the two sisters:—

"Your mandate I got,
You may all go to pot;

Had your senses been right,
You'd have sent before night;
As I hope to be saved,
I put off being shaved;
For I could not make bold,
While the matter was cold,
To meddle in suds,
Or to put on my duds;
So tell Horneck and Nesbitt
And Baker and his bit,
And Kauffman beside,
And the Jessamy bride;
With the rest of the crew,
The Reynoldses two,
Little Comedy's face
And the Captain in lace.

* * * *

Yet how can I when vext
Thus stray from my text?
Tell each other to rue
Your Devonshire crew,
For sending so late
To one of my state.
But 'tis Reynolds's way
From wisdom to stray,
And Angelica's whim
To be frolic like him.

But, alas! your good worships, how could they be wiser,
When both have been spoiled in to-day's *Advertiser?*"

"The Jessamy Bride" was the pet nickname he had bestowed on the younger Miss Horneck—the heroine of the speculative romance just mentioned; "Little Comedy" was her sister; "the Captain in lace" their brother, who was in the Guards. No doubt Mrs. Horneck and her daughters were very pleased to have

with them on this Continental trip so distinguished a person as Dr. Goldsmith; and he must have been very ungrateful if he was not glad to be provided with such charming companions. The story of the sudden envy he displayed of the admiration excited by the two handsome young Englishwomen as they stood at a hotel-window in Lille, is so incredibly foolish that it needs scarcely be repeated here; unless to repeat the warning that, if ever anybody was so dense as not to see the humour of that piece of acting, one had better look with grave suspicion on every one of the stories told about Goldsmith's vanities and absurdities.

Even with such pleasant companions, the trip to Paris was not everything he had hoped. "I find," he wrote to Reynolds from Paris, "that travelling at twenty and at forty are very different things. I set out with all my confirmed habits about me, and can find nothing on the Continent so good as when I formerly left it. One of our chief amusements here is scolding at everything we meet with, and praising every thing and every person we left at home. You may judge therefore whether your name is not frequently bandied at table among us. To tell you the truth, I never thought I could regret your absence so much, as our various mortifications on the road have often taught me to do. I could tell you of disasters and adventures without number, of our lying in barns, and of my being half poisoned with a dish of green peas, of our quarrelling with postilions and being cheated by our landladies, but I reserve all this for a happy hour which I expect to share with you upon my return." The fact is that although Goldsmith had seen a good deal of foreign

travel, the manner of his making the grand tour in his youth was not such as to fit him for acting as courier to a party of ladies. However, if they increased his troubles, they also shared them; and in this same letter he bears explicit testimony to the value of their companionship. "I will soon be among you, better pleased with my situation at home than I ever was before. And yet I must say, that if anything could make France pleasant, the very good women with whom I am at present would certainly do it. I could say more about that, but I intend showing them this letter before I send it away." Mrs. Horneck, Little Comedy, the Jessamy Bride, and the Professor of Ancient History at the Royal Academy, all returned to London; the last to resume his round of convivialities at taverns, excursions into regions of more fashionable amusement along with Reynolds, and task-work aimed at the pockets of the booksellers.

It was a happy-go-lucky sort of life. We find him now showing off his fine clothes and his sword and wig at Ranelagh Gardens, and again shut up in his chambers compiling memoirs and histories in hot haste; now the guest of Lord Clare, and figuring at Bath, and again delighting some small domestic circle by his quips and cranks; playing jokes for the amusement of children, and writing comic letters in verse to their elders; everywhere and at all times merry, thoughtless, good-natured. And, of course, we find also his humorous pleasantries being mistaken for blundering stupidity. In perfect good faith Boswell describes how a number of people burst out laughing when Goldsmith publicly complained that he had met Lord Camden at Lord

Clare's house in the country, "and he took no more notice of me than if I had been an ordinary man." Goldsmith's claiming to be a very extraordinary person was precisely a stroke of that humorous self depreciation in which he was continually indulging; and the Jessamy Bride has left it on record that "on many occasions, from the peculiar manner of his humour, and assumed frown of countenance, what was often uttered in jest was mistaken by those who did not know him for earnest." This would appear to have been one of those occasions. The company burst out laughing at Goldsmith's having made a fool of himself; and Johnson was compelled to come to his rescue. "Nay, gentlemen, Dr. Goldsmith is in the right. A nobleman ought to have made up to such a man as Goldsmith; and I think it is much against Lord Camden that he neglected him."

Mention of Lord Clare naturally recalls the *Haunch of Venison*. Goldsmith was particularly happy in writing bright and airy verses; the grace and lightness of his touch has rarely been approached. It must be confessed, however, that in this direction he was somewhat of an Autolycus; unconsidered trifles he freely appropriated; but he committed these thefts with scarcely any concealment, and with the most charming air in the world. In fact some of the snatches of verse which he contributed to the *Bee* scarcely profess to be anything else than translations, though the originals are not given. But who is likely to complain when we get as the result such a delightful piece of nonsense as the famous Elegy on that Glory of her Sex, Mrs. Mary Blaize, which has been the parent of a vast progeny since Goldsmith's time?

"Good people all, with one accord
Lament for Madam Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word,
From those who spoke her praise.

"The needy seldom passed her door,
And always found her kind;
She freely lent to all the poor,—
Who left a pledge behind.

"She strove the neighbourhood to please,
With manners wondrous winning;
And never followed wicked ways,—
Unless when she was sinning.

"At church, in silks and satins new,
With hoop of monstrous size,
She never slumbered in her pew,—
But when she shut her eyes.

"Her love was sought, I do aver,
By twenty beaux and more;
The king himself has followed her,—
When she has walked before.

"But now her wealth and finery fled,
Her hangers-on cut short all;
The doctors found, when she was dead,—
Her last disorder mortal.

"Let us lament, in sorrow sore,
For Kent Street well may say,
That had she lived a twelvemonth more,—
She had not died to-day."

The *Haunch of Venison*, on the other hand, is a poetical letter of thanks to Lord Clare—an easy, jocular epistle, in which the writer has a cut or two at certain of his literary brethren. Then, as he is looking at the venison,

and determining not to send it to any such people as Hiffernan or Higgins, who should step in but our old friend Beau Tibbs, or some one remarkably like him in manner and speech?—

"While thus I debated, in reverie centred,
An acquaintance, a friend as he called himself, entered;
An under-bred, fine-spoken fellow was he,
And he smiled as he looked at the venison and me.
'What have we got here?—Why this is good eating!
Your own, I suppose—or is it in waiting?'
'Why, whose should it be?' cried I with a flounce;
'I get these things often'—but that was a bounce:
'Some lords, my acquaintance, that settle the nation,
Are pleased to be kind—but I hate ostentation.'
'If that be the case then,' cried he, very gay,
'I'm glad I have taken this house in my way.
To-morrow you take a poor dinner with me;
No words—I insist on't—precisely at three;
We'll have Johnson, and Burke; all the wits will be there;
My acquaintance is slight, or I'd ask my Lord Clare.
And now that I think on't, as I am a sinner!
We wanted this venison to make out the dinner.
What say you—a pasty? It shall, and it must,
And my wife, little Kitty, is famous for crust.
Here, porter! this venison with me to Mile End;
No stirring—I beg—my dear friend—my dear friend!'
Thus, snatching his hat, he brushed off like the wind,
And the porter and eatables followed behind."

We need not follow the vanished venison—which did not make its appearance at the banquet any more than did Johnson or Burke—further than to say that if Lord Clare did not make it good to the poet he did not deserve to have his name associated with such a clever and careless *jeu d'esprit*.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

But the writing of smart verses could not keep Dr. Goldsmith alive, more especially as dinner-parties, Ranelagh masquerades, and similar diversions pressed heavily on his finances. When his *History of England* appeared, the literary cut-throats of the day accused him of having been bribed by the Government to betray the liberties of the people:[1] a foolish charge. What Goldsmith got for the *English History* was the sum originally stipulated for, and now no doubt all spent; with a further sum of fifty guineas for an abridgment of the work. Then, by this time, he had persuaded Griffin to advance him the whole of the eight hundred guineas for the *Animated Nature*, though he had only done about a third part of the book. At the instigation of Newbery he had begun a story after the manner of the *Vicar of Wakefield;* but it appears that such chapters as he had written were not deemed

1 "God knows I had no thought for or against liberty in my head; my whole aim being to make up a book of a decent size that, as Squire Richard says, 'would do no harm to nobody.'"—Goldsmith to Langton, September, 1771.

to be promising; and the undertaking was abandoned. The fact is, Goldsmith was now thinking of another method of replenishing his purse. The *Vicar of Wakefield* had brought him little but reputation; the *Good-natured Man* had brought him £500. It was to the stage that he now looked for assistance out of the financial slough in which he was plunged. He was engaged in writing a comedy; and that comedy was *She Stoops to Conquer*.

In the Dedication to Johnson which was prefixed to this play on its appearance in type, Goldsmith hints that the attempt to write a comedy not of the sentimental order then in fashion, was a hazardous thing; and also that Colman, who saw the piece in its various stages, was of this opinion too. Colman threw cold water on the undertaking from the very beginning. It was only extreme pressure on the part of Goldsmith's friends that induced – or rather compelled – him to accept the comedy; and that, after he had kept the unfortunate author in the tortures of suspense for month after month. But although Goldsmith knew the danger, he was resolved to face it. He hated the sentimentalists and all their works; and determined to keep his new comedy faithful to nature, whether people called it low or not. His object was to raise a genuine, hearty laugh; not to write a piece for school declamation; and he had enough confidence in himself to do the work in his own way. Moreover he took the earliest possible opportunity, in writing this piece of poking fun at the sensitive creatures who had been shocked by the "vulgarity" of *The Good-natured Man*. "Bravo! Bravo!" cry the jolly companions of Tony Lumpkin, when that promising buckeen

has finished his song at the Three Pigeons ; then follows criticism :—

"*First Fellow.* The squire has got spunk in him.

Second Fel. I loves to hear him sing, bekeays he never gives us nothing that's low.

Third Fel. O damn anything that's low, I cannot bear it.

Fourth Fel. The genteel thing is the genteel thing any time : if so be that a gentleman bees in a concatenation accordingly.

Third Fel. I likes the maxum of it, Master Muggins. What, though I am obligated to dance a bear, a man may be a gentleman for all that. May this be my poison, if my bear ever dances but to the very genteelest of tunes ; 'Water Parted,' or the 'The Minuet in Ariadne.'"

Indeed, Goldsmith, however he might figure in society, was always capable of holding his own when he had his pen in his hand. And even at the outset of this comedy one sees how much he has gained in literary confidence since the writing of the *Good natured Man*. Here there is no anxious stiffness at all ; but a brisk, free conversation, full of point that is not too formal, and yet conveying all the information that has usually to be crammed into a first scene. In taking as the groundwork of his plot that old adventure that had befallen himself—his mistaking a squire's house for an inn—he was hampering himself with something that was not the less improbable because it had actually happened ; but we begin to forget all the improbabilities through the naturalness of the people to whom we are introduced, and the brisk movement and life of the piece.

Fashions in dramatic literature may come and go ; but the wholesome good-natured fun of *She Stoops to Conquer*

is as capable of producing a hearty laugh now, as it was when it first saw the light in Covent Garden. Tony Lumpkin is one of the especial favourites of the theatre-going public; and no wonder. With all the young cub's jibes and jeers, his impudence and grimaces, one has a sneaking love for the scapegrace; we laugh with him, rather than at him; how can we fail to enjoy those malevolent tricks of his when he so obviously enjoys them himself? And Diggory—do we not owe an eternal debt of gratitude to honest Diggory for telling us about Ould Grouse in the gunroom, that immortal joke at which thousands and thousands of people have roared with laughter, though they never any one of them could tell what the story was about? The scene in which the old squire lectures his faithful attendants on their manners and duties, is one of the truest bits of comedy on the English stage:

"*Mr. Hardcastle.* But you're not to stand so, with your hands in your pockets. Take your hands from your pockets, Roger; and from your head, you blockhead you. See how Diggory carries his hands. They're a little too stiff, indeed, but that's no great matter.

Diggory. Ay, mind how I hold them. I learned to hold my hands this way when I was upon drill for the militia. And so being upon drill——

Hard. You must not be so talkative, Diggory. You must be all attention to the guests. You must hear us talk, and not think of talking; you must see us drink, and not think of drinking; you must see us eat, and not think of eating.

Dig. By the laws, your worship, that's parfectly unpossible, Whenever Diggory sees yeating going forward, ecod, he's always wishing for a mouthful himself.

Hard. Blockhead! Is not a bellyfull in the kitchen as good as a bellyfull in the parlour? Stay your stomach with that reflection.

Dig. Ecod, I thank your worship, I'll make a shift to stay my stomach with a slice of cold beef in the pantry.

Hard. Diggory, you are too talkative.—Then, if I happen to say a good thing, or tell a good story at table, you must not all burst out a-laughing, as if you made part of the company.

Dig. Then ecod your worship must not tell the story of Ould Grouse in the gunroom: I can't help laughing at that—he! he! he!—for the soul of me. We have laughed at that these twenty years—ha! ha! ha!

Hard. Ha! ha! ha! The story is a good one. Well, honest Diggory, you may laugh at that—but still remember to be attentive. Suppose one of the company should call for a glass of wine, how will you behave? A glass of wine, sir, if you please (*to* DIGGORY).—Eh, why don't you move?

Dig. Ecod, your worship, I never have courage till I see the eatables and drinkables brought upo' the table, and then I'm as bauld as a lion.

Hard. What, will nobody move?

First Serv. I'm not to leave this pleace.

Second Serv. I'm sure it's no pleace of mine.

Third Serv. Nor mine, for sartain.

Dig. Wauns, and I'm sure it canna be mine."

No doubt all this is very "low" indeed; and perhaps Mr. Colman may be forgiven for suspecting that the refined wits of the day would be shocked by these rude humours of a parcel of servants. But all that can be said in this direction was said at the time by Horace Walpole, in a letter to a friend of his; and this criticism is so amusing in its pretence and imbecility that it is worth quoting at large "Dr. Goldsmith has written a comedy," says this profound critic, "— no, it is the

lowest of all farces; it is not the subject I condemn, though very vulgar, but the execution. The drift tends to no moral, no edification of any kind the situations, however, are well imagined, and make one laugh in spite of the grossness of the dialogue, the forced witticisms, and total improbability of the whole plan and conduct. But what disgusts me most is, that though the characters are very low, and aim at low humour, not one of them says a sentence that is natural, or marks any character at all." Horace Walpole sighing for edification—from a Covent Garden comedy! Surely, if the old gods have any laughter left, and if they take any notice of what is done in the literary world here below, there must have rumbled through the courts of Olympus a guffaw of sardonic laughter, when that solemn criticism was put down on paper.

Meanwhile Colman's original fears had developed into a sort of stupid obstinacy. He was so convinced that the play would not succeed, that he would spend no money in putting it on the stage; while far and wide he announced its failure as a foregone conclusion. Under this gloom of vaticination the rehearsals were nevertheless proceeded with—the brunt of the quarrels among the players falling wholly on Goldsmith, for the manager seems to have withdrawn in despair; while all the Johnson confraternity were determined to do what they could for Goldsmith on the opening night. That was the 15th of March, 1773. His friends invited the author to dinner as a prelude to the play; Dr. Johnson was in the chair; there was plenty of gaiety. But this means of keeping up the anxious author's spirits was not very successful. Goldsmith's mouth, we are told by Reynolds,

became so parched "from the agitation of his mind, that he was unable to swallow a single mouthful." Moreover, he could not face the ordeal of sitting through the play; when his friends left the tavern and betook themselves to the theatre, he went away by himself; and was subsequently found walking in St. James's Park. The friend who discovered him there, persuaded him that his presence in the theatre might be useful in case of an emergency; and ultimately got him to accompany him to Covent Garden. When Goldsmith reached the theatre, the fifth act had been begun.

Oddly enough, the first thing he heard on entering the stage door was a hiss. The story goes that the poor author was dreadfully frightened; and that in answer to a hurried question, Colman exclaimed, "Psha! Doctor, don't be afraid of a squib, when we have been sitting these two hours on a barrel of gunpowder." If this was meant as a hoax, it was a cruel one; if meant seriously, it was untrue. For the piece had turned out a great hit. From beginning to end of the performance the audience were in a roar of laughter; and the single hiss that Goldsmith unluckily heard was so markedly exceptional, that it became the talk of the town, and was variously attributed to one or other of Goldsmith's rivals. Colman, too, suffered at the hands of the wits for his gloomy and falsified predictions; and had, indeed, to beg Goldsmith to intercede for him. It is a great pity that Boswell was not in London at this time; for then we might have had a description of the supper that naturally would follow the play, and of Goldsmith's demeanour under this new success. Besides the gratification, moreover, of his choice of materials being

approved by the public, there was the material benefit accruing to him from the three "author's nights." These are supposed to have produced nearly five hundred pounds—a substantial sum in those days.

Boswell did not come to London till the second of April following; and the first mention we find of Goldsmith is in connection with an incident which has its ludicrous as well as its regrettable aspect. The further success of *She Stoops to Conquer* was not likely to propitiate the wretched hole-and-corner cut-throats that infested the journalism of that day. More especially was Kenrick driven mad with envy; and so, in a letter addressed to the *London Packet*, this poor creature determined once more to set aside the judgment of the public, and show Dr. Goldsmith in his true colours. The letter is a wretched production, full of personalities only fit for an angry washerwoman, and of rancour without point. But there was one passage in it that effectually roused Goldsmith's rage; for here the Jessamy Bride was introduced as "the lovely H—k." The letter was anonymous; but the publisher of the print, a man called Evans, was known; and so Goldsmith thought he would go and give Evans a beating. If he had asked Johnson's advice about the matter, he would no doubt have been told to pay no heed at all to anonymous scurrility—certainly not to attempt to reply to it with a cudgel. When Johnson heard that Foote meant to "take him off," he turned to Davies and asked him what was the common price of an oak stick; but an oak stick in Johnson's hands, and an oak stick in Goldsmith's hands, were two different things. However, to the bookseller's shop the indignant poet proceeded, in company

with a friend; got hold of Evans; accused him of having insulted a young lady by putting her name in his paper; and, when the publisher would fain have shifted the responsibility on to the editor, forthwith denounced him as a rascal, and hit him over the back with his cane. The publisher, however, was quite a match for Goldsmith; and there is no saying how the deadly combat might have ended, had not a lamp been broken overhead, the oil of which drenched both the warriors. This intervention of the superior gods was just as successful as a Homeric cloud; the fray ceased; Goldsmith and his friend withdrew; and ultimately an action for assault was compromised by Goldsmith's paying fifty pounds to a charity. Then the howl of the journals arose. Their prerogative had been assailed. "Attacks upon private character were the most liberal existing source of newspaper income," Mr. Forster writes; and so the pack turned with one cry on the unlucky poet. There was nothing of "the Monument" about poor Goldsmith; and at last he was worried into writing a letter of defence addressed to the public. "He has indeed done it very well," said Johnson to Boswell, "but it is a foolish thing well done." And further he remarked, "Why, sir, I believe it is the first time he has *beat;* he may have *been beaten* before. This, sir, is a new plume to him."

CHAPTER XVII.

INCREASING DIFFICULTIES.—THE END.

The pecuniary success of *She Stoops to Conquer* did but little to relieve Goldsmith from those financial embarrassments which were now weighing heavily on his mind. And now he had less of the old high spirits that had enabled him to laugh off the cares of debt. His health became disordered; an old disease renewed its attacks, and was grown more violent because of his long-continued sedentary habits. Indeed, from this point to the day of his death—not a long interval, either—we find little but a record of successive endeavours, some of them wild and hopeless enough, to obtain money anyhow. Of course he went to the Club, as usual; and gave dinner-parties; and had a laugh or a song ready for the occasion. It is possible, also, to trace a certain growth of confidence in himself, no doubt the result of the repeated proofs of his genius he had put before his friends. It was something more than mere personal intimacy that justified the rebuke he administered to Reynolds, when the latter painted an allegorical picture representing the triumph of Beattie and Truth over Voltaire and Scepticism. "It very ill

becomes a man of your eminence and character," he said, "to debase so high a genius as Voltaire before so mean a writer as Beattie. Beattie and his book will be forgotten in ten years, while Voltaire's fame will last for ever. Take care it does not perpetuate this picture, to the shame of such a man as you." He was aware, too, of the position he had won for himself in English literature He knew that people in after-days would ask about him; and it was with no sort of unwarrantable vainglory that he gave Percy certain materials for a biography which he wished him to undertake. Hence the *Percy Memoir*.

He was only forty-five when he made this request; and he had not suffered much from illness during his life; so that there was apparently no grounds for imagining that the end was near. But at this time Goldsmith began to suffer severe fits of depression; and he grew irritable and capricious of temper—no doubt another result of failing health. He was embroiled in disputes with the booksellers; and, on one occasion, seems to have been much hurt because Johnson, who had been asked to step in as arbiter, decided against him. He was offended with Johnson on another occasion because of his sending away certain dishes at a dinner given to him by Goldsmith, as a hint that these entertainments were too luxurious for one in Goldsmith's position. It was probably owing to some temporary feeling of this sort—perhaps to some expression of it on Goldsmith's part—that Johnson spoke of Goldsmith's "malice" towards him. Mrs. Thrale had suggested that Goldsmith would be the best person to write Johnson's biography. "The dog would write it best, to be sure,'

said Johnson, "but his particular malice towards me, and general disregard of truth, would make the book useless to all and injurious to my character." Of course it is always impossible to say what measure of jocular exaggeration there may not be in a chance phrase such as this: of the fact that there was no serious or permanent quarrel between the two friends we have abundant proof in Boswell's faithful pages.

To return to the various endeavours made by Goldsmith and his friends to meet the difficulties now closing in around him, we find, first of all, the familiar hack-work. For two volumes of a *History of Greece* he had received from Griffin £250. Then his friends tried to get him a pension from the Government; but this was definitely refused. An expedient of his own seemed to promise well at first. He thought of bringing out a *Popular Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, a series of contributions mostly by his friends, with himself as editor; and among those who offered to assist him were Johnson, Reynolds, Burke, and Dr. Burney. But the booksellers were afraid. The project would involve a large expense; and they had no high opinion of Goldsmith's business habits. Then he offered to alter *The Good-natured Man* for Garrick; but Garrick preferred to treat with him for a new comedy, and generously allowed him to draw on him for the money in advance. This last help enabled him to go to Barton for a brief holiday; but the relief was only temporary. On his return to London even his nearest friends began to observe the change in his manner. In the old days Goldsmith had faced pecuniary difficulties with a light heart; but now, his health broken, and every avenue

of escape apparently closed, he was giving way to despair. His friend Cradock, coming up to town, found Goldsmith in a most despondent condition; and also hints that the unhappy author was trying to conceal the true state of affairs. "I believe," says Cradock, "he died miserable, and that his friends were not entirely aware of his distress."

And yet it was during this closing period of anxiety, despondency, and gloomy foreboding, that the brilliant and humorous lines of *Retaliation* were written—that last scintillation of the bright and happy genius that was soon to be extinguished for ever. The most varied accounts have been given of the origin of this *jeu d'esprit;* and even Garrick's, which was meant to supersede and correct all others, is self-contradictory. For according to this version of the story, which was found among the Garrick papers, and which is printed in Mr. Cunningham's edition of Goldsmith's works, the whole thing arose out of Goldsmith and Garrick resolving one evening at the St. James's Coffee House to write each other's epitaph Garrick's well known couplet was instantly produced:

> "Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
> Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll."

Goldsmith, according to Garrick, either would not or could not retort at the moment; "but went to work, and some weeks after produced the following printed poem, called *Retaliation.*" But Garrick himself goes on to say, "The following poems in manuscript were written by several of the gentlemen on purpose to provoke the

Doctor to an answer, which came forth at last with great credit to him in *Retaliation*." The most probable version of the story, which may be pieced together from various sources, is that at the coffee house named this business of writing comic epitaphs was started some evening or other by the whole company; that Goldsmith and Garrick pitted themselves against each other; that thereafter Goldsmith began as occasion served to write similar squibs about his friends, which were shown about as they were written; that thereupon those gentlemen, not to be behindhand, composed more elaborate pieces in proof of their wit; and that, finally, Goldsmith resolved to bind these fugitive lines of his together in a poem, which he left unfinished, and which, under the name of *Retaliation*, was published after his death. This hypothetical account receives some confirmation from the fact that the scheme of the poem and its component parts do not fit together well; the introduction looks like an after-thought; and has not the freedom and pungency of a piece of improvisation. An imaginary dinner is described, the guests being Garrick, Reynolds, Burke, Cumberland, and the rest of them, Goldsmith last of all. More wine is called for, until the whole of his companions have fallen beneath the table:

> "Then, with chaos and blunders encircling my head,
> Let me ponder, and tell what I think of the *dead*."

This is a somewhat clumsy excuse for introducing a series of epitaphs; but the epitaphs amply atone for it. That on Garrick is especially remarkable as a bit of

character-sketching; its shrewd hints—all in perfect courtesy and good humour—going a little nearer to the truth than is common in epitaphs of any sort:—

"Here lies David Garrick, describe me who can;
An abridgment of all that was pleasant in man.
As an actor, confessed without rival to shine:
As a wit, if not first, in the very first line:
Yet, with talents like these, and an excellent heart,
The man had his failings, a dupe to his art.
Like an ill-judging beauty, his colours he spread,
And beplastered with rouge his own natural red.
On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting;
'Twas only that, when he was off, he was acting.
With no reason on earth to go out of his way,
He turned and he varied full ten times a day:
Though secure of our hearts, yet confoundedly sick
If they were not his own by finessing and trick;
He cast off his friends, as a huntsman his pack,
For he knew when he pleased he could whistle them back.
Of praise a mere glutton, he swallowed what came;
And the puff of a dunce, he mistook it for fame;
Till his relish grown callous, almost to disease,
Who peppered the highest was surest to please.
But let us be candid, and speak out our mind:
If dunces applauded, he paid them in kind.
Ye Kenricks, ye Kellys, and Woodfalls so grave,
What a commerce was yours, while you got and you gave!
How did Grub Street re-echo the shouts that you raised,
While he was be-Rosciused, and you were bepraised.
But peace to his spirit, wherever it flies,
To act as an angel and mix with the skies:
Those poets who owe their best fame to his skill
Shall still be his flatterers, go where he will;
Old Shakespeare receive him with praise and with love,
And Beaumonts and Bens be his Kellys above."

The truth is that Goldsmith, though he was ready to bless his "honest little man" when he received from him sixty pounds in advance for a comedy not begun, never took quite so kindly to Garrick as to some of his other friends. There is no pretence of discrimination at all, for example, in the lines devoted in this poem to Reynolds. All the generous enthusiasm of Goldsmith's Irish nature appears here; he will admit of no possible rival to this especial friend of his:—

> "Here Reynolds is laid, and to tell you my mind,
> He has not left a wiser or better behind."

There is a tradition that the epitaph on Reynolds, ending with the unfinished line

> "By flattery unspoiled * * *"

was Goldsmith's last piece of writing. One would like to believe that, in any case.

Goldsmith had returned to his Edgware lodgings, and had, indeed, formed some notion of selling his chambers in the Temple, and living in the country for at least ten months in the year, when a sudden attack of his old disorder drove him into town again for medical advice. He would appear to have received some relief; but a nervous fever followed; and on the night of the 25th March, 1774, when he was but forty-six years of age, he took to his bed for the last time. At first he refused to regard his illness as serious; and insisted on dosing himself with certain fever-powders from which he had received benefit on previous occasions; but by and by as his strength gave way, he submitted to the advice of the physicians who were in attendance on him. Day

after day passed; his weakness visibly increasing, though, curiously enough, the symptoms of fever were gradually abating. At length one of the doctors, remarking to him that his pulse was in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever, asked him if his mind was at ease. "No, it is not," answered Goldsmith; and these were his last words. Early in the morning of Monday, April 4, convulsions set in; these continued for rather more than an hour; then the troubled brain and the sick heart found rest for ever.

When the news was carried to his friends, Burke, it is said, burst into tears, and Reynolds put aside his work for the day. But it does not appear that they had visited him during his illness; and neither Johnson, nor Reynolds, nor Burke, nor Garrick followed his body to the grave. It is true, a public funeral was talked of; and, among others, Reynolds, Burke, and Garrick were to have carried the pall; but this was abandoned; and Goldsmith was privately buried in the ground of the Temple Church on the 9th of April, 1774. Strangely enough, too, Johnson seems to have omitted all mention of Goldsmith from his letters to Boswell. It was not until Boswell had written to him, on June 24th, "You have said nothing to me about poor Goldsmith," that Johnson, writing on July 4, answered as follows:—"Of poor dear Dr. Goldsmith there is little to be told, more than the papers have made public. He died of a fever, made, I am afraid, more violent by uneasiness of mind. His debts began to be heavy, and all his resources were exhausted. Sir Joshua is of opinion that he owed not less than two thousand pounds. Was ever poet so trusted before?"

But if the greatest grief at the sudden and premature death of Goldsmith would seem to have been shown at the moment by certain wretched creatures who were found weeping on the stairs leading to his chambers, it must not be supposed that his fine friends either forgot him, or ceased to regard his memory with a great gentleness and kindness. Some two years after, when a monument was about to be erected to Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey, Johnson consented to write "the poor dear Doctor's epitaph;" and so anxious were the members of that famous circle in which Goldsmith had figured, that a just tribute should be paid to his genius, that they even ventured to send a round robin to the great Cham desiring him to amend his first draft. Now, perhaps, we have less interest in Johnson's estimate of Goldsmith's genius—though it contains the famous *Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit*—than in the phrases which tell of the honour paid to the memory of the dead poet by the love of his companions and the faithfulness of his friends. It may here be added that the precise spot where Goldsmith was buried in the Temple churchyard is unknown. So lived and so died Oliver Goldsmith.

In the foregoing pages the writings of Goldsmith have been given so prominent a place in the history of his life that it is unnecessary to take them here collectively and endeavour to sum up their distinctive qualities. As much as could be said within the limited space has, it is hoped, been said about their genuine and tender pathos, that never at any time

verges on the affected or theatrical; about their quaint delicate, delightful humour; about that broader humour that is not afraid to provoke the wholesome laughter of mankind by dealing with common and familiar ways, and manners, and men; about that choiceness of diction, that lightness and grace of touch, that lend a charm even to Goldsmith's ordinary hack-work.

Still less necessary, perhaps, is it to review the facts and circumstances of Goldsmith's life; and to make of them an example, a warning, or an accusation. That has too often been done. His name has been used to glorify a sham Bohemianism—a Bohemianism that finds it easy to live in taverns, but does not find it easy, so far as one sees, to write poems like the *Deserted Village*. His experiences as an author have been brought forward to swell the cry about neglected genius—that is, by writers who assume their genius in order to prove the neglect. The misery that occasionally befell him during his wayward career has been made the basis of an accusation against society, the English constitution, Christianity—Heaven knows what. It is time to have done with all this nonsense. Goldsmith resorted to the hack-work of literature when everything else had failed him; and he was fairly paid for it. When he did better work, when he "struck for honest fame," the nation gave him all the honour that he could have desired. With an assured reputation, and with ample means of subsistence, he obtained entrance into the most distinguished society then in England—he was made the friend of England's greatest in the arts and literature—and could have confined himself to that society exclusively if he had chosen. His temperament, no doubt, exposed him to

suffering; and the exquisite sensitiveness of a man of genius may demand our sympathy; but in far greater measure is our sympathy demanded for the thousands upon thousands of people who, from illness or nervous excitability, suffer from quite as keen a sensitiveness without the consolation of the fame that genius brings.

In plain truth, Goldsmith himself would have been the last to put forward pleas humiliating alike to himself and to his calling. Instead of beseeching the State to look after authors; instead of imploring society to grant them "recognition;" instead of saying of himself "he wrote, and paid the penalty;" he would frankly have admitted that he chose to live his life his own way, and therefore paid the penalty. This is not written with any desire of upbraiding Goldsmith. He did choose to live his own life his own way, and we now have the splendid and beautiful results of his work; and the world—looking at these with a constant admiration, and with a great and lenient love for their author—is not anxious to know what he did with his guineas, or whether the milkman was ever paid. "He had raised money and squandered it, by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense. BUT LET NOT HIS FRAILTIES BE REMEMBERED: HE WAS A VERY GREAT MAN." This is Johnson's wise summing up; and with it we may here take leave of gentle Goldsmith.

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COWPER

COWPER

BY

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COWPER.

COWPER.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE.

Cowper is the most important English poet of the period between Pope and the illustrious group headed by Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, which arose out of the intellectual ferment of the European Revolution. As a reformer of poetry, who called it back from conventionality to nature, and at the same time as the teacher of a new school of sentiment which acted as a solvent upon the existing moral and social system, he may perhaps himself be numbered among the precursors of the Revolution, though he was certainly the mildest of them all. As a sentimentalist he presents a faint analogy to Rousseau, whom in natural temperament he somewhat resembled. He was also the great poet of the religious revival which marked the latter part of the eighteenth century in England, and which was called Evangelicism within the establishment and Methodism without. In this way he is associated with Wesley and Whitefield, as well as with the philanthropists of the movement, such as Wilberforce, Thornton, and Clarkson. As a poet he touches, on dif-

ferent sides of his character, Goldsmith, Crabbe, and Burns. With Goldsmith and Crabbe he shares the honour of improving English taste in the sense of truthfulness and simplicity. To Burns he felt his affinity, across a gulf of social circumstance, and in spite of a dialect not yet made fashionable by Scott. Besides his poetry, he holds a high, perhaps the highest place, among English letter writers: and the collection of his letters appended to Southey's biography forms, with the biographical portions of his poetry, the materials for a sketch of his life. Southey's biography itself is very helpful, though too prolix and too much filled out with dissertations for common readers. Had its author only done for Cowper what he did for Nelson![1]

William Cowper came of the Whig nobility of the robe. His great-uncle, after whom he was named, was the Whig Lord Chancellor of Anne and George I. His grandfather was that Spencer Cowper, judge of the Common Pleas, for love of whom the pretty Quakeress drowned herself, and who, by the rancour of party, was indicted for her murder. His father, the Rev. John Cowper, D.D., was chaplain to George II. His mother was a Donne, of the race of the poet, and descended by several lines from Henry III. A Whig and a gentleman he was by birth, a Whig and a gentleman he remained to the end. He was born on the 15th November (old style), 1731, in his father's rectory of Berkhampstead. From nature he received, with a large measure of the gifts of genius, a still larger measure of its painful sensibilities. In his portrait by Romney the brow bespeaks intellect, the features feeling

[1] Our acknowledgments are also due to Mr. Benham, the writer of the Memoir prefixed to the Globe Edition of Cowper.

and refinement, the eye madness. The stronger parts of character, the combative and propelling forces he evidently lacked from the beginning. For the battle of life he was totally unfit. His judgment in its healthy state was, even on practical questions, sound enough, as his letters abundantly prove; but his sensibility not only rendered him incapable of wrestling with a rough world, but kept him always on the verge of madness, and frequently plunged him into it. To the malady which threw him out of active life we owe not the meanest of English poets.

At the age of thirty-two, writing of himself, he says, "I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool, but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity—I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom." Folly produces nothing good, and if Cowper had been an absolute fool, he would not have written good poetry. But he does not exaggerate his own weakness, and that he should have become a power among men is a remarkable triumph of the influences which have given birth to Christian civilization.

The world into which the child came was one very adverse to him, and at the same time very much in need of him. It was a world from which the spirit of poetry seemed to have fled. There could be no stronger proof of this than the occupation of the throne of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton by the arch-versifier Pope. The Revolution of 1688 was glorious, but unlike the Puritan

Revolution which it followed, and in the political sphere partly ratified, it was profoundly prosaic. Spiritual religion, the source of Puritan grandeur and of the poetry of Milton, was almost extinct; there was not much more of it among the Nonconformists, who had now become to a great extent mere Whigs, with a decided Unitarian tendency. The Church was little better than a political force, cultivated and manipulated by political leaders for their own purposes. The Bishops were either politicians or theological polemics collecting trophies of victory over free-thinkers as titles to higher preferment. The inferior clergy as a body were far nearer in character to Trulliber than to Dr. Primrose; coarse, sordid, neglectful of their duties, shamelessly addicted to sinecurism and pluralities, fanatics in their Toryism and in attachment to their corporate privileges, cold, rationalistic and almost heathen in their preachings, if they preached at all. The society of the day is mirrored in the pictures of Hogarth, in the works of Fielding and Smollett; hard and heartless polish was the best of it; and not a little of it was *Marriage à la Mode*. Chesterfield, with his soulless culture, his court graces, and his fashionable immoralities, was about the highest type of an English gentleman; but the Wilkeses, Potters, and Sandwiches, whose mania for vice culminated in the Hell-fire Club, were more numerous than the Chesterfields. Among the country squires, for one Allworthy or Sir Roger de Coverley there were many Westerns. Among the common people religion was almost extinct, and assuredly no new morality or sentiment, such as Positivists now promise, had taken its place. Sometimes the rustic thought for himself, and scepticism took formal possession of his mind; but, as we see from one of

Cowper's letters, it was a coarse scepticism which desired to be buried with its hounds. Ignorance and brutality reigned in the cottage. Drunkenness reigned in palace and cottage alike. Gambling, cockfighting, and bull-fighting were the amusements of the people. Political life, which, if it had been pure and vigorous, might have made up for the absence of spiritual influences, was corrupt from the top of the scale to the bottom : its effect on national character is pourtrayed in Hogarth's *Election*. That property had its duties as well as its rights, nobody had yet ventured to say or think. The duty of a gentleman towards his own class was to pay his debts of honour and to fight a duel whenever he was challenged by one of his own order ; towards the lower class his duty was none. Though the forms of government were elective, and Cowper gives us a description of the candidate at election time obsequiously soliciting votes, society was intensely aristocratic, and each rank was divided from that below it by a sharp line which precluded brotherhood or sympathy. Says the Duchess of Buckingham to Lady Huntingdon, who had asked her to come and hear Whitefield, "I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers ; their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinctured with disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting ; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding. I shall be most happy to come and hear your favourite preacher." Her

Grace's sentiments towards the common wretches that crawl on the earth were shared, we may be sure, by her Grace's waiting-maid. Of humanity there was as little as there was of religion. It was the age of the criminal law which hanged men for petty thefts, of life-long imprisonment for debt, of the stocks and the pillory, of a Temple Bar garnished with the heads of traitors, of the unreformed prison system, of the press-gang, of unrestrained tyranny and savagery at public schools. That the slave trade was iniquitous hardly any one suspected; even men who deemed themselves religious took part in it without scruple. But a change was at hand, and a still mightier change was in prospect. At the time of Cowper's birth, John Wesley was twenty-eight and Whitefield was seventeen. With them the revival of religion was at hand. Johnson, the moral reformer, was twenty-two. Howard was born, and in less than a generation Wilberforce was to come.

When Cowper was six years old his mother died; and seldom has a child, even such a child, lost more, even in a mother. Fifty years after her death he still thinks of her, he says, with love and tenderness every day. Late in his life his cousin Mrs. Anne Bodham recalled herself to his remembrance by sending him his mother's picture. "Every creature," he writes, "that has any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her; I love you therefore, and love you much, both for her sake and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and received it with a trepidation of nerves and

spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had its dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it and hung it where it is the last object which I see at night, and the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember too a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper, and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side." As Cowper never married, there was nothing to take the place in his heart which had been left vacant by his mother.

My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?
Perhaps thou gavest me, though unfelt, a kiss;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile!—it answers—Yes.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
And, turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!
But was it such?—It was.—Where thou art gone
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting word shall pass my lips no more!
Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.
What ardently I wish'd, I long believed,
And disappointed still, was still deceived;

By expectation every day beguiled,
Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
Till, all my stock of infant sorrows spent,
I learn'd at last submission to my lot,
But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.

In the years that followed no doubt he remembered her too well. At six years of age this little mass of timid and quivering sensibility was, in accordance with the cruel custom of the time, sent to a large boarding school. The change from home to a boarding school is bad enough now; it was much worse in those days.

"I had hardships," says Cowper, "of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad of about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!" Cowper charges himself, it may be in the exaggerated style of a self-accusing saint, with having become at school an adept in the art of lying. Southey says this must be a mistake, since at English public schools boys do not learn to lie. But the mistake is on Southey's part; bullying, such as

this child endured, while it makes the strong boys tyrants, makes the weak boys cowards, and teaches them to defend themselves by deceit, the fist of the weak. The recollection of this boarding school mainly it was that at a later day inspired the plea for a home education in *Tirocinium*.

> Then why resign into a stranger's hand
> A task as much within your own command,
> That God and nature, and your interest too,
> Seem with one voice to delegate to you?
> Why hire a lodging in a house unknown
> For one whose tenderest thoughts all hover round your own?
> This second weaning, needless as it is,
> How does it lacerate both your heart and his!
> The indented stick that loses day by day
> Notch after notch, till all are smooth'd away,
> Bears witness long ere his dismission come,
> With what intense desire he wants his home.
> But though the joys he hopes beneath your roof
> Bid fair enough to answer in the proof,
> Harmless, and safe, and natural as they are,
> A disappointment waits him even there:
> Arrived, he feels an unexpected change,
> He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange.
> No longer takes, as once, with fearless ease,
> His favourite stand between his father's knees,
> But seeks the corner of some distant seat,
> And eyes the door, and watches a retreat,
> And, least familiar where he should be most,
> Feels all his happiest privileges lost.
> Alas, poor boy!—the natural effect
> Of love by absence chill'd into respect.

From the boarding school, the boy, his eyes being liable to inflammation, was sent to live with an oculist, in whose house he spent two years, enjoying at all events a respite from the sufferings and the evils of the boarding

school. He was then sent to Westminster School, at that time in its glory. That Westminster in those days must have been a scene not merely of hardship, but of cruel suffering and degradation to the younger and weaker boys, has been proved by the researches of the Public Schools Commission. There was an established system and a regular vocabulary of bullying. Yet Cowper seems not to have been so unhappy there as at the private school; he speaks of himself as having excelled at cricket and football; and excellence in cricket and football at a public school generally carries with it, besides health and enjoyment, not merely immunity from bullying, but high social consideration. With all Cowper's delicacy and sensitiveness, he must have had a certain fund of physical strength, or he could hardly have borne the literary labour of his later years, especially as he was subject to the medical treatment of a worse than empirical era. At one time he says, while he was at Westminster, his spirits were so buoyant that he fancied he should never die, till a skull thrown out before him by a grave-digger as he was passing through St. Margaret's church-yard in the night recalled him to a sense of his mortality.

The instruction at a public school in those days was exclusively classical. Cowper was under Vincent Bourne, his portrait of whom is in some respects a picture not only of its immediate subject, but of the schoolmaster of the last century. "I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in his way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to him. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster when I passed through it. He

was so good-natured and so indolent that I lost more than I got by him, for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. . . . . I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks and box his ears to put it out again." Cowper learned, if not to write Latin verses as well as Vinny Bourne himself, to write them very well, as his Latin versions of some of his own short poems bear witness. Not only so, but he evidently became a good classical scholar, as classical scholarship was in those days, and acquired the literary form of which the classics are the best school. Out of school hours he studied independently, as clever boys under the unexacting rule of the old public schools often did, and read through the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with a friend. He also probably picked up at Westminster much of the little knowledge of the world which he ever possessed. Among his schoolfellows was Warren Hastings, in whose guilt as proconsul he afterwards, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, refused to believe, and Impey, whose character has had the ill-fortune to be required as the shade in Macaulay's fancy picture of Hastings.

On leaving Westminster, Cowper, at eighteen, went to live with Mr. Chapman, an attorney, to whom he was articled, being destined for the Law. He chose that profession, he says, not of his own accord, but to gratify an indulgent father, who may have been led into the error by a recollection of the legal honours of the family, as well as by the "silver pence" which his promising son had won by his Latin verses at Westminster School.

The youth duly slept at the attorney's house in Ely Place. His days were spent in "giggling and making giggle" with his cousins, Theodora and Harriet, the daughters of Ashley Cowper, in the neighbouring Southampton Row. Ashley Cowper was a very little man in a white hat lined with yellow, and his nephew used to say that he would one day be picked by mistake for a mushroom. His fellow-clerk in the office, and his accomplice in giggling and making giggle, was one strangely mated with him; the strong, aspiring, and unscrupulous Thurlow, who though fond of pleasure was at the same time preparing himself to push his way to wealth and power. Cowper felt that Thurlow would reach the summit of ambition, while he would himself remain below, and made his friend promise when he was Chancellor to give him something. When Thurlow was Chancellor, he gave Cowper his advice on translating Homer.

At the end of his three years with the attorney, Cowper took chambers in the Middle, from which he afterwards removed to the Inner Temple. The Temple is now a pile of law offices. In those days it was still a Society. One of Cowper's set says of it: "The Temple is the barrier that divides the City and suburbs; and the gentlemen who reside there seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are in general a kind of citizen courtiers. They aim at the air and the mien of the drawing-room; but the holy-day smoothness of a 'prentice, heightened with some additional touches of the rake or coxcomb, betrays itself in everything they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world; and it is a thousand pities that so pretty a society should

be disgraced with a few dull fellows, who can submit to puzzle themselves with cases and reports, and have not taste enough to follow the genteel method of studying the law." Cowper at all events studied law by the genteel method; he read it almost as little in the Temple as he had in the attorney's office, though in due course of time he was formally called to the Bar, and even managed in some way to acquire a reputation, which when he had entirely given up the profession brought him a curious offer of a readership at Lyons Inn. His time was given to literature, and he became a member of a little circle of men of letters and journalists which had its social centre in the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men who dined together every Thursday. In the set were Bonnell Thornton and Colman, twin wits, fellow-writers of the periodical essays which were the rage in that day, joint proprietors of the *St. James's Chronicle*, contributors both of them to the *Connoisseur*, and translators, Colman of Terence, Bonnell Thornton of Plautus, Colman being a dramatist besides. In the set was Lloyd, another wit and essayist and a poet, with a character not of the best. On the edge of the set, but apparently not in it, was Churchill, who was then running a course which to many seemed meteoric, and of whose verse, sometimes strong but always turbid, Cowper conceived and retained an extravagant admiration. Churchill was a link to Wilkes; Hogarth too was an ally of Colman, and helped him in his exhibition of Signs. The set was strictly confined to Westminsters. Gray and Mason, being Etonians, were objects of its literary hostility and butts of its satire. It is needless to say much about these literary companions of Cowper's youth; his intercourse with them was totally broken off, and

before he himself became a poet its effects had been obliterated by madness, entire change of mind, and the lapse of twenty years. If a trace remained, it was in his admiration of Churchill's verses, and in the general results of literary society, and of early practice in composition. Cowper contributed to the *Connoiseur* and the *St. James's Chronicle*. His papers in the *Connoisseur* have been preserved; they are mainly imitations of the lighter papers of the *Spectator* by a student who affects the man of the world. He also dallied with poetry, writing verses to "Delia," and an epistle to Lloyd. He had translated an elegy of Tibullus when he was fourteen, and at Westminster he had written an imitation of Phillips's *Splendid Shilling*, which, Southey says, shows his manner formed. He helped his Cambridge brother, John Cowper, in a translation of the *Henriade*. He kept up his classics, especially his Homer. In his letters there are proofs of his familiarity with Rousseau. Two or three ballads which he wrote are lost, but he says they were popular, and we may believe him. Probably they were patriotic. "When poor Bob White," he says, "brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec."

The "Delia" to whom Cowper wrote verses was his cousin Theodora, with whom he had an unfortunate love affair. Her father, Ashley Cowper, forbade their marriage, nominally on the ground of consanguinity, really, as Southey thinks, because he saw Cowper's unfitness for business and inability to maintain a wife. Cowper felt the disappointment deeply at the time, as well he might

do if Theodora resembled her sister, Lady Hesketh. Theodora remained unmarried, and, as we shall see, did not forget her lover. His letters she preserved till her death in extreme old age.

In 1756 Cowper's father died. There does not seem to have been much intercourse between them, nor does the son in after-years speak with any deep feeling of his loss: possibly his complaint in *Tirocinium* of the effect of boarding-schools, in estranging children from their parents, may have had some reference to his own case. His local affections, however, were very strong, and he felt with unusual keenness the final parting from his old home, and the pang of thinking that strangers usurp our dwelling and the familiar places will know us no more.

> Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
> Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
> And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
> Drew me to school along the public way,
> Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapp'd
> In scarlet mantle warm and velvet capp'd.
> 'Tis now become a history little known,
> That once we call'd the pastoral house our own.

Before the rector's death, it seems, his pen had hardly realized the cruel frailty of the tenure by which a home in a parsonage is held. Of the family of Berkhampstead Rectory there was now left besides himself only his brother John Cowper, Fellow of Caius College, Cambridge, whose birth had cost their mother's life.

When Cowper was thirty-two and still living in the Temple, came the sad and decisive crisis of his life. He went mad and attempted suicide. What was the source of his madness? There is a vague tradition that it arose

from licentiousness, which no doubt is sometimes the cause of insanity. But in Cowper's case there is no proof of anything of the kind: his confessions, after his conversion, of his own past sinfulness point to nothing worse than general ungodliness and occasional excess in wine; and the tradition derives a colour of probability only from the loose lives of one or two of the wits and Bohemians with whom he had lived. His virtuous love of Theodora was scarcely compatible with low and gross amours. Generally, his madness is said to have been religious, and the blame is laid on the same foe to human weal as that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. But when he first went mad, his conversion to Evangelicism had not taken place; he had not led a particularly religious life, nor been greatly given to religious practices, though as a clergyman's son he naturally believed in religion, had at times felt religious emotions, and when he found his heart sinking had tried devotional books and prayers. The truth is his malady was simple hypochondria, having its source in delicacy of constitution and weakness of digestion, combined with the influence of melancholy surroundings. It had begun to attack him soon after his settlement in his lonely chambers in the Temple, when his pursuits and associations, as we have seen, were far from Evangelical. When its crisis arrived, he was living by himself without any society of the kind that suited him (for the excitement of the Nonsense Club was sure to be followed by reaction); he had lost his love, his father, his home, and as it happened also a dear friend; his little patrimony was fast dwindling away; he must have despaired of success in his profession; and his outlook was altogether dark. It yielded to the remedies to which hypochondria usually yields,

air, exercise, sunshine, cheerful society, congenial occupation. It came with January and went with May. Its gathering gloom was dispelled for a time by a stroll in fine weather on the hills above Southampton Water, and Cowper said that he was never unhappy for a whole day in the company of Lady Hesketh. When he had become a Methodist, his hypochondria took a religious form, but so did his recovery from hypochondria; both must be set down to the account of his faith, or neither. This double aspect of the matter will plainly appear further on. A votary of wealth when his brain gives way under disease or age fancies that he is a beggar. A Methodist when his brain gives way under the same influences fancies that he is forsaken of God. In both cases the root of the malady is physical.

In the lines which Cowper sent on his disappointment to Theodora's sister, and which record the sources of his despondency, there is not a touch of religious despair, or of anything connected with religion. The catastrophe was brought on by an incident with which religion had nothing to do. The office of clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords fell vacant, and was in the gift of Cowper's kinsman Major Cowper, as patentee. Cowper received the nomination. He had longed for the office, sinfully as he afterwards fancied; it would exactly have suited him and made him comfortable for life. But his mind had by this time succumbed to his malady. His fancy conjured up visions of opposition to the appointment in the House of Lords; of hostility in the office where he had to study the Journals; of the terrors of an examination to be undergone before the frowning peers. After hopelessly poring over the Journals for some months

he became quite mad, and his madness took a suicidal form. He has told with unsparing exactness the story of his attempts to kill himself. In his youth his father had unwisely given him a treatise in favour of suicide to read, and when he argued against it, had listened to his reasonings in a silence which he construed as sympathy with the writer, though it seems to have been only unwillingness to think too badly of the state of a departed friend. This now recurred to his mind, and talk with casual companions in taverns and chophouses was enough in his present condition to confirm him in his belief that self-destruction was lawful. Evidently he was perfectly insane, for he could not take up a newspaper without reading in it a fancied libel on himself. First he bought laudanum, and had gone out into the fields with the intention of swallowing it, when the love of life suggested another way of escaping the dreadful ordeal. He might sell all he had, fly to France, change his religion, and bury himself in a monastery. He went home to pack up; but while he was looking over his portmanteau, his mood changed, and he again resolved on self-destruction. Taking a coach he ordered the coachman to drive to the Tower Wharf, intending to throw himself into the river. But the love of life once more interposed, under the guise of a low tide and a porter seated on the quay. Again in the coach, and afterwards in his chambers, he tried to swallow the laudanum; but his hand was paralysed by "the convincing Spirit," aided by seasonable interruptions from the presence of his laundress and her husband, and at length he threw the laudanum away. On the night before the day appointed for the examination before the Lords, he lay some time with the point of his penknife

pressed against his heart, but without courage to drive it home. Lastly he tried to hang himself; and on this occasion he seems to have been saved not by the love of life, or by want of resolution, but by mere accident. He had become insensible, when the garter by which he was suspended broke, and his fall brought in the laundress, who supposed him to be in a fit. He sent her to a friend, to whom he related all that had passed, and despatched him to his kinsman. His kinsman arrived, listened with horror to the story, made more vivid by the sight of the broken garter, saw at once that all thought of the appointment was at end, and carried away the instrument of nomination. Let those whom despondency assails read this passage of Cowper's life, and remember that he lived to write *John Gilpin* and *The Task.*

Cowper tells us that "to this moment he had felt no concern of a spiritual kind;" that "ignorant of original sin, insensible of the guilt of actual transgression, he understood neither the Law nor the Gospel; the condemning nature of the one, nor the restoring mercies of of the other." But after attempting suicide he was seized, as he well might be, with religious horrors. Now it was that he began to ask himself whether he had been guilty of the unpardonable sin, and was presently persuaded that he had, though it would be vain to inquire what he imagined the unpardonable sin to be. In this mood, he fancied that if there was any balm for him in Gilead, it would be found in the ministrations of his friend Martin Madan, an Evangelical clergyman of high repute, whom he had been wont to regard as an enthusiast. His Cambridge brother, John, the translator of the *Henriade,* seems to have had some philosophic doubts as to the efficacy of the proposed

remedy; but, like a philosopher, he consented to the experiment. Mr. Madan came and ministered, but in that distempered soul his balm turned to poison; his religious conversations only fed the horrible illusion. A set of English Sapphics, written by Cowper at this time, and expressing his despair, were unfortunately preserved; they are a ghastly play of the poetic faculty in a mind utterly deprived of self-control, and amidst the horrors of inrushing madness. Diabolical, they might be termed more truly than religious.

There was nothing for it but a madhouse. The sufferer was consigned to the private asylum of Dr. Cotton, at St. Alban's. An ill-chosen physician Dr. Cotton would have been, if the malady had really had its source in religion; for he was himself a pious man, a writer of hymns, and was in the habit of holding religious intercourse with his patients. Cowper, after his recovery, speaks of that intercourse with the keenest pleasure and gratitude; so that in the opinion of the two persons best qualified to judge, religion in this case was not the bane. Cowper has given us a full account of his recovery. It was brought about, as we can plainly see, by medical treatment wisely applied; but it came in the form of a burst of religious faith and hope. He rises one morning feeling better; grows cheerful over his breakfast, takes up the Bible, which in his fits of madness he always threw aside, and turns to a verse in the Epistle to the Romans. "Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon in His blood, and the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed

and received the Gospel." Cotton at first mistrusted the sudden change, but he was at length satisfied, pronounced his patient cured, and discharged him from the asylum, after a detention of eighteen months. Cowper hymned his deliverance in *The Happy Change*, as in the hideous Sapphics he had given religious utterance to his despair.

> The soul, a dreary province once
> Of Satan's dark domain,
> Feels a new empire form'd within,
> And owns a heavenly reign.
>
> The glorious orb whose golden beams
> The fruitful year control,
> Since first obedient to Thy word,
> He started from the goal,
>
> Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
> His orient rays impart;
> But, Jesus, 'tis Thy light alone
> Can shine upon the heart.

Once for all, the reader of Cowper's life must make up his mind to acquiesce in religious forms of expression. If he does not sympathize with them, he will recognize them as phenomena of opinion, and bear them like a philosopher. He can easily translate them into the language of psychology, or even of physiology, if he thinks fit.

CHAPTER II.

AT HUNTINGDON—THE UNWINS.

The storm was over; but it had swept away a great part of Cowper's scanty fortune, and almost all his friends. At thirty-five he was stranded and desolate. He was obliged to resign a Commissionership of Bankruptcy which he held, and little seems to have remained to him but the rent of his chambers in the Temple. A return to his profession was, of course, out of the question. His relations, however, combined to make up a little income for him, though from a hope of his family, he had become a melancholy disappointment; even the Major contributing, in spite of the rather trying incident of the nomination. His brother was kind and did a brother's duty, but there does not seem to have been much sympathy between them; John Cowper did not become a convert to Evangelical doctrine till he was near his end, and he was incapable of sharing William's spiritual emotions. Of his brilliant companions, the Bonnell Thorntons and the Colmans, the quondam members of the Nonsense Club, he heard no more, till he had himself become famous. But he still had a staunch friend in a less brilliant member of the Club, Joseph Hill, the lawyer, evidently a man who united strong sense and depth of character with

literary tastes and love of fun, and who was throughout Cowper's life his Mentor in matters of business, with regard to which he was himself a child. He had brought with him from the asylum at St. Albans the servant who had attended him there, and who had been drawn by the singular talisman of personal attraction which partly made up to this frail and helpless being for his entire lack of force. He had also brought from the same place an outcast boy whose case had excited his interest, and for whom he afterwards provided by putting him to a trade. The maintenance of these two retainers was expensive and led to grumbling among the subscribers to the family subsidy, the Major especially threatening to withdraw his contribution. While the matter was in agitation, Cowper received an anonymous letter couched in the kindest terms, bidding him not distress himself, for that whatever deduction from his income might be made, the loss would be supplied by one who loved him tenderly and approved his conduct. In a letter to Lady Hesketh, he says that he wishes he knew who dictated this letter, and that he had seen not long before a style excessively like it. He can scarcely have failed to guess that it came from Theodora.

It is due to Cowper to say that he accepts the assistance of his relatives and all acts of kindness done to him with sweet and becoming thankfulness; and that whatever dark fancies he may have had about his religious state, when the evil spirit was upon him, he always speaks with contentment and cheerfulness of his earthly lot. Nothing splenetic, no element of suspicious and irritable self-love, entered into the composition of his character.

On his release from the asylum he was taken in hand by his brother John, who first tried to find lodgings for him

at or near Cambridge, and failing in this, placed him at Huntingdon, within a long ride, so that William becoming a horseman for the purpose, the brothers could meet once a week. Huntingdon was a quiet little town with less than two thousand inhabitants, in a dull country, the best part of which was the Ouse, especially to Cowper, who was fond of bathing. Life there, as in other English country towns in those days, and indeed till railroads made people everywhere too restless and migratory for companionship or even for acquaintance, was sociable in an unrefined way. There were assemblies, dances, races, card-parties, and a bowling-green, at which the little world met and enjoyed itself. From these the new convert, in his spiritual ecstasy, of course turned away as mere modes of murdering time. Three families received him with civility, two of them with cordiality; but the chief acquaintances he made were with "odd scrambling fellows like himself;" an eccentric water-drinker and vegetarian who was to be met by early risers and walkers every morning at six o'clock by his favourite spring; a char-parson, of the class common in those days of sinecurism and non-residence, who walked sixteen miles every Sunday to serve two churches, besides reading daily prayers at Huntingdon, and who regaled his friend with ale brewed by his own hands. In his attached servant the recluse boasted that he had a friend; a friend he might have, but hardly a companion.

For the first days and even weeks, however, Huntingdon seemed a paradise. The heart of its new inhabitant was full of the unspeakable happiness that comes with calm after storm, with health after the most terrible of maladies, with repose after the burning fever of the

brain. When first he went to church he was in a spiritual ecstasy; it was with difficulty that he restrained his emotions; though his voice was silent, being stopped by the intensity of his feelings, his heart within him sang for joy; and when the Gospel for the day was read, the sound of it was more than he could well bear. This brightness of his mind communicated itself to all the objects round him, to the sluggish waters of the Ouse, to dull, fenny Huntingdon, and to its commonplace inhabitants.

For about three months his cheerfulness lasted, and with the help of books, and his rides to meet his brother, he got on pretty well; but then "the communion which he had so long been able to maintain with the Lord was suddenly interrupted." This is his theological version of the case; the rationalistic version immediately follows: "I began to dislike my solitary situation, and to fear I should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling." No man could be less fitted to bear a lonely life; persistence in the attempt would soon have brought back his madness. He was longing for a home; and a home was at hand to receive him. It was not perhaps one of the happiest kind; but the influence which detracted from its advantages was the one which rendered it hospitable to the wanderer. If Christian piety was carried to a morbid excess beneath its roof, Christian charity opened its door.

The religious revival was now in full career, with Wesley for its chief apostle, organizer, and dictator, Whitefield for its great preacher, Fletcher of Madeley for its typical saint, Lady Huntingdon for its patroness among the aristocracy and the chief of its "devout women."

From the pulpit, but still more from the stand of the field-preacher and through a well-trained army of social propagandists, it was assailing the scepticism, the coldness, the frivolity, the vices of the age. English society was deeply stirred; multitudes were converted, while among those who were not converted violent and sometimes cruel antagonism was aroused. The party had two wings, the Evangelicals, people of the wealthier class or clergymen of the Church of England, who remained within the Establishment; and the Methodists, people of the lower middle class or peasants, the personal converts and followers of Wesley and Whitefield, who, like their leaders, without a positive secession, soon found themselves organizing a separate spiritual life in the freedom of Dissent. In the early stages of the movement the Evangelicals were to be counted at most by hundreds, the Methodists by hundreds of thousands. So far as the masses were concerned, it was in fact a preaching of Christianity anew. There was a cross division of the party into the Calvinists and those whom the Calvinists called Arminians; Wesley belonging to the latter section, while the most pronounced and vehement of the Calvinists was "the fierce Toplady." As a rule, the darker and sterner element, that which delighted in religious terrors and threatenings was Calvinist, the milder and gentler, that which preached a gospel of love and hope, continued to look up to Wesley, and to bear with him the reproach of being Arminian.

It is needless to enter into a minute description of Evangelicism and Methodism; they are not things of the past. If Evangelicism has now been reduced to a narrow domain by the advancing forces of Ritualism on one side

and of Rationalism on the other, Methodism is still the great Protestant Church, especially beyond the Atlantic. The spiritual fire which they have kindled, the character which they have produced, the moral reforms which they have wrought, the works of charity and philanthropy to which they have given birth, are matters not only of recent memory, but of present experience. Like the great Protestant revivals which had preceded them in England, like the Moravian revival on the Continent, to which they were closely related, they sought to bring the soul into direct communion with its Maker, rejecting the intervention of a priesthood or a sacramental system. Unlike the previous revivals in England, they warred not against the rulers of the Church or State, but only against vice or irreligion. Consequently in the characters which they produced, as compared with those produced by Wycliffism, by the Reformation, and notably by Puritanism, there was less of force and the grandeur connected with it, more of gentleness, mysticism, and religious love. Even Quietism, or something like it, prevailed, especially among the Evangelicals, who were not like the Methodists, engaged in framing a new organization or in wrestling with the barbarous vices of the lower orders. No movement of the kind has ever been exempt from drawbacks and follies, from extravagance, exaggeration, breaches of good taste in religious matters, unctuousness, and cant—from chimerical attempts to get rid of the flesh and live an angelic life on earth—from delusions about special providences and miracles—from a tendency to over-value doctrine and undervalue duty—from arrogant assumption of spiritual authority by leaders and preachers—from the self-righteousness which fancies

itself the object of a divine election, and looks out with a sort of religious complacency from the Ark of Salvation in which it fancies itself securely placed, upon the drowning of an unregenerate world. Still it will hardly be doubted that in the effects produced by Evangelicism and Methodism the good has outweighed the evil. Had Jansenism prospered as well, France might have had more of reform and less of revolution. The poet of the movement will not be condemned on account of his connexion with it, any more than Milton is condemned on account of his connexion with Puritanism, provided it be found that he also served art well.

Cowper, as we have seen, was already converted. In a letter written at this time to Lady Hesketh, he speaks of himself with great humility "as a convert made in Bedlam, who is more likely to be a stumblingblock to others, than to advance their faith," though he adds, with reason enough, "that he who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners, and a reformation of the heart itself, to madness is guilty of an absurdity, that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself." It is hence to be presumed that he traced his conversion to his spiritual intercourse with the Evangelical physician of St. Albans, though the seed sown by Martin Madan may perhaps also have sprung up in his heart when the more propitious season arrived. However that may have been, the two great factors of Cowper's life were the malady which consigned him to poetic seclusion and the conversion to Evangelicism, which gave him his inspiration and his theme.

At Huntingdon dwelt the Rev. William Unwin, a clergyman, taking pupils, his wife, much younger than himself,

and their son and daughter. It was a typical family of the Revival. Old Mr. Unwin is described by Cowper as a Parson Adams. The son, William Unwin, was preparing for holy orders. He was a man of some mark, and received tokens of intellectual respect from Paley, though he is best known as the friend to whom many of Cowper's letters are addressed. He it was who, struck by the appearance of the stranger, sought an opportunity of making his acquaintance. He found one, after morning church, when Cowper was taking his solitary walk beneath the trees. Under the influence of religious sympathy the acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship; Cowper at once became one of the Unwin circle, and soon afterwards, a vacancy being made by the departure of one of the pupils, he became a boarder in the house. This position he had passionately desired on religious grounds; but in truth he might well have desired it on economical grounds also, for he had begun to experience the difficulty and expensiveness, as well as the loneliness, of bachelor housekeeping, and financial deficit was evidently before him. To Mrs. Unwin he was from the first strongly drawn. "I met Mrs. Unwin in the street," he says, "and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience with the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company." Mrs. Unwin's character is written in her portrait with its prim but pleasant features; a Puritan and a precisian she was; but she was not morose or sour, and she had a boundless capacity for affection. Lady Hesketh,

a woman of the world, and a good judge in every respect, says of her at a later period, when she had passed with Cowper through many sad and trying years: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de temps en temps*, she seems to have by nature a quiet fund of gaiety; great indeed must it have been, not to have been wholly overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I said before, has in the most literal sense of those words, no will or shadow of inclination but what is his. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem perhaps to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character develops itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions, but on all subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and indeed had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way."

When Cowper became an author he paid the highest respect to Mrs. Unwin as an instinctive critic, and called her his Lord Chamberlain, whose approbation was his sufficient licence for publication.

Life in the Unwin family is thus described by the new inmate:—"As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none. The place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day, and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read in my own apartment, or walk or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts I hope are the best performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short we make this

excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell you that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren."

Mrs. Cowper, the wife of Major (now Colonel) Cowper, to whom this was written, was herself strongly Evangelical; Cowper had, in fact, unfortunately for him, turned from his other relations and friends to her on that account. She, therefore, would have no difficulty in thinking that such a life was consistent with cheerfulness, but ordinary readers will ask how it could fail to bring on another fit of hypochondria. The answer is probably to be found in the last words of the passage. Overstrained and ascetic piety found an antidote in affection. The Unwins were Puritans and enthusiasts, but their household was a picture of domestic love.

With the name of Mrs. Cowper is connected an incident which occurred at this time, and which illustrates the propensity to self-inspection and self-revelation which Cowper had in common with Rousseau. Huntingdon, like other little towns, was all eyes and gossip; the new comer was a mysterious stranger who kept himself aloof from the general society, and he naturally became the mark for a little stone-throwing. Young Unwin happening to be passing near "the Park" on his way from London to Huntingdon, Cowper gave him an introduction to its lady, in a letter to whom he afterwards disclosed his secret motive. "My dear Cousin,—You sent my

friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with everything he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vainglory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered, in that fruitful soil, the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is a matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong. Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility;* yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called 'that fellow Cowper,' which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh pride! pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and goodwill. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger,—and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper,—will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But,

in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name."

Once more, however obsolete Cowper's belief, and the language in which he expresses it may have become for many of us, we must take it as his philosophy of life. At this time, at all events, it was a source of happiness. "The storm being passed, a quiet and peaceful serenity of soul succeeded;" and the serenity in this case was unquestionably produced in part by the faith.

> I was a stricken deer that left the herd
> Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
> My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
> To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
> There was I found by one who had himself
> Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore
> And in his hands and feet the cruel scars,
> With gentle force soliciting the darts,
> He drew them forth and healed and bade me live.

Cowper thought for a moment of taking orders, but his dread of appearing in public conspired with the good sense which lay beneath his excessive sensibility to put a veto on the design. He, however, exercised the zeal of a neophyte in proselytism to a greater extent than his own judgment and good taste approved when his enthusiasm had calmed down.

CHAPTER III.

AT OLNEY—MR. NEWTON.

Cowper had not been two years with the Unwins when Mr. Unwin, the father, was killed by a fall from his horse; this broke up the household. But between Cowper and Mrs. Unwin an indissoluble tie had been formed. It seems clear, notwithstanding Southey's assertion to the contrary, that they at one time meditated marriage, possibly as a propitiation to the evil tongues which did not spare even this most innocent connexion; but they were prevented from fulfilling their intention by a return of Cowper's malady. They became companions for life. Cowper says they were as mother and son to each other; but Mrs. Unwin was only seven years older than he. To label their connexion is impossible, and to try to do it would be a platitude. In his poems Cowper calls Mrs. Unwin Mary; she seems always to have called him Mr. Cowper. It is evident that her son, a strictly virtuous and religious man, never had the slightest misgiving about his mother's position.

The pair had to choose a dwelling-place; they chose Olney in Buckinghamshire, on the Ouse. The Ouse was "a slow winding river," watering low meadows, from which crept pestilential fogs. Olney was a dull town, or

rather village, inhabited by a population of lace-makers, ill-paid, fever-stricken, and for the most part as brutal as they were poor. There was not a woman in the place excepting Mrs. Newton with whom Mrs. Unwin could associate, or to whom she could look for help in sickness or other need. The house in which the pair took up their abode was dismal, prison-like, and tumble-down; when they left it, the competitors for the succession were a cobbler and a publican. It looked upon the Market Place, but it was in the close neighbourhood of Silver End, the worst part of Olney. In winter the cellars were full of water. There were no pleasant walks within easy reach, and in winter Cowper's only exercise was pacing thirty yards of gravel, with the dreary supplement of dumb-bells. What was the attraction to this "well," this "abyss," as Cowper himself called it, and as, physically and socially, it was?

The attraction was the presence of the Rev. John Newton, then curate of Olney. The vicar was Moses Brown, an Evangelical and a religious writer, who has even deserved a place among the worthies of the revival; but a family of thirteen children, some of whom it appears too closely resembled the sons of Eli, had compelled him to take advantage of the indulgent character of the ecclesiastical polity of those days by becoming a pluralist and a non-resident, so that the curate had Olney to himself. The patron was the Lord Dartmouth, who, as Cowper says, "wore a coronet and prayed." John Newton was one of the shining lights and foremost leaders and preachers of the revival. His name was great both in the Evangelical churches within the pale of the Establishment, and in the Methodist churches without it. He

was a brand plucked from the very heart of the burning. We have a memoir of his life, partly written by himself, in the form of letters, and completed under his superintendence. It is a monument of the age of Smollett and Wesley, not less characteristic than is Cellini's memoir of the times in which he lived. His father was master of a vessel, and took him to sea when he was eleven. His mother was a pious Dissenter, who was at great pains to store his mind with religious thoughts and pieces. She died when he was young, and his stepmother was not pious. He began to drag his religious anchor, and at length, having read Shaftesbury, left his theological moorings altogether, and drifted into a wide sea of ungodliness, blasphemy, and recklessness of living. Such at least is the picture drawn by the sinner saved of his own earlier years. While still but a stripling he fell desperately in love with a girl of thirteen; his affection for her was as constant as it was romantic; through all his wanderings and sufferings he never ceased to think of her, and after seven years she became his wife. His father frowned on the engagement, and he became estranged from home. He was impressed; narrowly escaped shipwreck, deserted, and was arrested and flogged as a deserter. Released from the navy, he was taken into the service of a slave-dealer on the coast of Africa, at whose hands, and those of the man's negro mistress, he endured every sort of ill-treatment and contumely, being so starved that he was fain sometimes to devour raw roots to stay his hunger. His constitution must have been of iron to carry him through all that he endured. In the meantime his indomitable mind was engaged in attempts at self-culture; he studied a Euclid

which he had brought with him, drawing his diagrams on the sand, and he afterwards managed to teach himself Latin by means of a Horace and a Latin Bible, aided by some slight vestiges of the education which he had received at a grammar school. His conversion was brought about by the continued influences of Thomas à Kempis, of a very narrow escape, after terrible sufferings, from shipwreck, of the impression made by the sights of the mighty deep on a soul which, in its weather-beaten casing, had retained its native sensibility, and, we may safely add, of the disregarded but not forgotten teachings of his pious mother. Providence was now kind to him; he became captain of a slave-ship, and made several voyages on the business of the trade. That it was a wicked trade he seems to have had no idea: he says he never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion than on his two last voyages to Guinea. Afterwards it occurred to him that though his employment was genteel and profitable, it made him a sort of gaoler, unpleasantly conversant with both chains and shackles; and he besought Providence to fix him in a more humane calling.

In answer to his prayer came a fit of apoplexy, which made it dangerous for him to go to sea again. He obtained an office in the port of Liverpool, but soon he set his heart on becoming a minister of the Church of England. He applied for ordination to the Archbishop of York, but not having the degree required by the rules of the Establishment, he received through his Grace's secretary "the softest refusal imaginable." The Archbishop had not had the advantage of perusing Lord Macaulay's remarks on the difference between the policy

of the Church of England and that of the Church of Rome, with regard to the utilization of religious enthusiasts. In the end Newton was ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln, and threw himself with the energy of a newborn apostle upon the irreligion and brutality of Olney. No Carthusian's breast could glow more intensely with the zeal which is the offspring of remorse. Newton was a Calvinist of course, though it seems not an extreme one, otherwise he would probably have confirmed Cowper in the darkest of hallucinations. His religion was one of mystery and miracle, full of sudden conversions, special providences and satanic visitations. He himself says that "his name was up about the country for preaching people mad:" it is true that in the eyes of the profane Methodism itself was madness; but he goes on to say "whether it is owing to the sedentary life the women live here, poring over their (lace) pillows for ten or twelve hours every day, and breathing confined air in their crowded little rooms, or whatever may be the immediate cause, I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them I believe truly gracious people." He surmises that "these things are permitted in judgment, that they who seek occasion for cavilling and stumbling may have what they want." Nevertheless there were in him not only force, courage, burning zeal for doing good, but great kindness, and even tenderness of heart. "I see in this world," he said, "two heaps of human happiness and misery; now if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add it to the other I carry a point—if, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and by giving it another I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something." There was even

in him a strain, if not of humour, of a shrewdness which was akin to it, and expressed itself in many pithy sayings. "If two angels came down from heaven to execute a divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire and the other to sweep a street in it, they would feel no inclination to change employments." "A Christian should never plead spirituality for being a sloven; if he be but a shoe-cleaner, he should be the best in the parish." "My principal method for defeating heresy is by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares; now if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts." That his Calvinism was not very dark or sulphureous, seems to be shown from his repeating with gusto the saying of one of the old women of Olney when some preacher dwelt on the doctrine of predestination—"Ah, I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing to have chosen me for afterwards." That he had too much sense to take mere profession for religion appears from his describing the Calvinists of Olney as of two sorts, which reminded him of the two baskets of Jeremiah's figs. The iron constitution which had carried him through so many hardships, enabled him to continue in his ministry to extreme old age. A friend at length counselled him to stop before he found himself stopped by being able to speak no longer. "I cannot stop," he said, raising his voice. "What! shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"

At the instance of a common friend, Newton had paid Mrs. Unwin a visit at Huntingdon, after her husband's death, and had at once established the ascendancy of a

powerful character over her and Cowper. He now beckoned the pair to his side, placed them in the house adjoining his own, and opened a private door between the two gardens, so as to have his spiritual children always beneath his eye. Under this, in the most essential respect, unhappy influence, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin together entered on "a decided course of Christian happiness. That is to say they spent all their days in a round of religious exercises without relaxation or relief. On fine summer evenings, as the sensible Lady Hesketh saw with dismay, instead of a walk, there was a prayer-meeting. Cowper himself was made to do violence to his intense shyness by leading in prayer. He was also made to visit the poor at once on spiritual missions, and on that of almsgiving, for which Thornton, the religious philanthropist, supplied Newton and his disciples with means. This, which Southey appears to think about the worst part of Newton's regimen, was probably its redeeming feature. The effect of doing good to others on any mind was sure to be good; and the sight of real suffering was likely to banish fancied ills. Cowper in this way gained at all events a practical knowledge of the poor, and learned to do them justice, though from a rather too theological point of view. Seclusion from the sinful world was as much a part of the system of Mr. Newton, as it was of the system of Saint Benedict. Cowper was almost entirely cut off from intercourse with his friends and people of his own class. He dropped his correspondence even with his beloved cousin, Lady Hesketh, and would probably have dropped his correspondence with Hill, had not Hill's assistance in money matters been indispensable. To complete his mental isolation it appears

that having sold his library he had scarcely any books. Such a course of Christian happiness as this could only end in one way; and Newton himself seems to have had the sense to see that a storm was brewing, and that there was no way of conjuring it but by contriving some more congenial occupation. So the disciple was commanded to employ his poetical gifts in contributing to a hymn-book which Newton was compiling. Cowper's Olney hymns have not any serious value as poetry. Hymns rarely have. The relations of man with Deity transcend and repel poetical treatment. There is nothing in them on which the creative imagination can be exercised. Hymns can be little more than incense of the worshipping soul. Those of the Latin church are the best; not because they are better poetry than the rest (for they are not), but because their language is the most sonorous. Cowper's hymns were accepted by the religious body for which they were written, as expressions of its spiritual feeling and desires; so far they were successful. They are the work of a religious man of culture, and free from anything wild, erotic, or unctuous. But on the other hand there is nothing in them suited to be the vehicle of lofty devotion, nothing, that we can conceive a multitude or even a prayer-meeting uplifting to heaven with voice and heart. Southey has pointed to some passages on which the shadow of the advancing malady falls; but in the main there is a predominance of religious joy and hope. The most despondent hymn of the series is *Temptation*, the thought of which resembles that of *The Castaway*.

Cowper's melancholy may have been aggravated by the loss of his only brother, who died about this time, and

at whose death-bed he was present; though in the narrative which he wrote, joy at John's conversion and the religious happiness of his end seems to exclude the feelings by which hypochondria was likely to be fed. But his mode of life under Newton was enough to account for the return of his disease, which in this sense may be fairly laid to the charge of religion. He again went mad, fancied as before that he was rejected of heaven, ceased to pray as one helplessly doomed, and again attempted suicide. Newton and Mrs. Unwin at first treated the disease as a diabolical visitation, and "with deplorable consistency," to borrow the phrase used by one of their friends in the case of Cowper's desperate abstinence from prayer, abstained from calling in a physician. Of this again their religion must bear the reproach. In other respects they behaved admirably. Mrs. Unwin, shut up for sixteen months with her unhappy partner, tended him with unfailing love; alone she did it, for he could bear no one else about him; though to make her part more trying he had conceived the insane idea that she hated him. Seldom has a stronger proof been given of the sustaining power of affection. Assuredly of whatever Cowper may have afterwards done for his kind, a great part must be set down to the credit of Mrs. Unwin.

Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,
Such aid from heaven as some have feigned they drew,
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things,
That, ere through age or woe I shed my wings,
I may record thy worth with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalizes whom it sings.

But thou hast little need. There is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,
A chronicle of actions just and bright;
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary shine,
And, since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

Newton's friendship too was sorely tried. In the midst of the malady the lunatic took it into his head to transfer himself from his own house to the Vicarage, which he obstinately refused to leave; and Newton bore this infliction for several months without repining, though he might well pray earnestly for his friend's deliverance. "The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait on him in this dark valley, and he has given us such a love to him, both as a believer and a friend, that I am not weary; but to be sure his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive." Dr. Cotton was at last called in, and under his treatment, evidently directed against a bodily disease, Cowper was at length restored to sanity.

Newton once compared his own walk in the world to that of a physician going through Bedlam. But he was not skilful in his treatment of the literally insane. He thought to cajole Cowper out of his cherished horrors by calling his attention to a case resembling his own. The case was that of Simon Browne, a Dissenter, who had conceived the idea that, being under the displeasure of Heaven, he had been entirely deprived of his rational being and left with merely his animal nature. He had accordingly resigned his ministry, and employed himself in compiling a dictionary, which, he said, was doing nothing that could require a reasonable soul. He seems

to have thought that theology fell under the same category, for he proceeded to write some theological treatises, which he dedicated to Queen Caroline, calling her Majesty's attention to the singularity of the authorship as the most remarkable phenomenon of her reign. Cowper, however, instead of falling into the desired train of reasoning, and being led to suspect the existence of a similar illusion in himself, merely rejected the claim of the pretended rival in spiritual affliction, declaring his own case to be far the more deplorable of the two.

Before the decided course of Christian happiness had time again to culminate in madness, fortunately for Cowper, Newton left Olney for St. Mary Woolnoth. He was driven away at last by a quarrel with his barbarous parishioners, the cause of which did him credit. A fire broke out at Olney, and burnt a good many of its straw-thatched cottages. Newton ascribed the extinction of the fire rather to prayer than water, but he took the lead in practical measures of relief, and tried to remove the earthly cause of such visitations by putting an end to bonfires and illuminations on the 5th of November. Threatened with the loss of their Guy Fawkes, the barbarians rose upon him, and he had a narrow escape from their violence. We are reminded of the case of Cotton Mather, who, after being a leader in witch-burning, nearly sacrificed his life in combatting the fanaticism which opposed itself to the introduction of inoculation. Let it always be remembered that besides its theological side, the Revival had its philanthropic and moral side; that it abolished the slave trade, and at last slavery; that it waged war, and effective war, under the standard of the gospel, upon masses of vice and brutality, which

had been totally neglected by the torpor of the Establishment; that among large classes of the people it was the great civilizing agency of the time.

Newton was succeeded as curate of Olney by his disciple, and a man of somewhat the same cast of mind and character, Thomas Scott the writer of the *Commentary on the Bible* and *The Force of Truth*. To Scott Cowper seems not to have greatly taken. He complains that, as a preacher, he is always scolding the congregation. Perhaps Newton had foreseen that it would be so, for he specially commended the spiritual son whom he was leaving, to the care of the Rev. William Bull, of the neighbouring town of Newport Pagnell, a dissenting minister, but a member of a spiritual connexion which did not stop at the line of demarcation between Nonconformity and the Establishment. To Bull Cowper did greatly take; he extols him as "a Dissenter, but a liberal one," a man of letters and of genius, master of a fine imagination—or, rather, not master of it—and addresses him as *Carissime Taurorum*. It is rather singular that Newton should have given himself such a successor. Bull was a great smoker, and had made himself a cozy and secluded nook in his garden for the enjoyment of his pipe. He was probably something of a spiritual as well as of a physical Quietist, for he set Cowper to translate the poetry of the great exponent of Quietism, Madame Guyon. The theme of all the pieces which Cowper has translated is the same—Divine Love and the raptures of the heart that enjoys it—the blissful union of the drop with the Ocean—the Evangelical Nirvana. If this line of thought was not altogether healthy, or conducive to the vigorous performance of practical duty, it was at all

events better than the dark fancy of Reprobation. In his admiration of Madame Guyon, her translator showed his affinity, and that of Protestants of the same school, to Fénelon and the Evangelical element which has lurked in the Roman Catholic church since the days of Thomas à Kempis.

CHAPTER IV.

AUTHORSHIP. THE MORAL SATIRES.

Since his recovery, Cowper had been looking out for what he most needed, a pleasant occupation. He tried drawing, carpentering, gardening. Of gardening he had always been fond; and he understood it as shown by the loving though somewhat "stercoraceous" minuteness of some passages in *The Task*. A little greenhouse, used as a parlour in summer, where he sat surrounded by beauty and fragrance, and lulled by pleasant sounds, was another product of the same pursuit, and seems almost Elysian in that dull dark life. He also found amusement in keeping tame hares, and he fancied that he had reconciled the hare to man and dog. His three tame hares are among the canonized pets of literature, and they were to his genius what "Sailor" was to the genius of Byron. But Mrs. Unwin, who had terrible reason for studying his case, saw that the thing most wanted was congenial employment for the mind, and she incited him to try his hand at poetry on a larger scale. He listened to her advice, and when he was nearly fifty years of age became a poet. He had acquired the faculty of verse-writing, as we have seen; he had even to some extent formed his manner when he was young. Age must by this time have quenched his fire, and tamed his imagination, so

that the didactic style would suit him best. In the length of the interval between his early poems and his great work he resembles Milton; but widely different in the two cases had been the current of the intervening years.

Poetry written late in life is of course free from youthful crudity and extravagance. It also escapes the youthful tendency to imitation. Cowper's authorship is ushered in by Southey with a history of English poetry; but this is hardly in place; Cowper had little connexion with anything before him. Even his knowledge of poetry was not great. In his youth he had read the great poets, and had studied Milton especially with the ardour of intense admiration. Nothing ever made him so angry as Johnson's Life of Milton. "Oh!" he cries, "I could thrash his old jacket till I made his pension jingle in his pocket." Churchill had made a great—far too great—an impression on him, when he was a Templar. Of Churchill, if of anybody, he must be regarded as a follower, though only in his earlier and less successful poems. In expression he always regarded as a model the neat and gay simplicity of Prior. But so little had he kept up his reading of anything but sermons and hymns, that he learned for the first time from Johnson's Lives the existence of Collins. He is the offspring of the Religious Revival rather than of any school of art. His most important relation to any of his predecessors is, in fact, one of antagonism to the hard glitter of Pope.

In urging her companion to write poetry, Mrs. Unwin was on the right path; her puritanism led her astray in the choice of a theme. She suggested *The Progress of Error* as a subject for a "Moral Satire." It was unhappily adopted, and *The Progress of Error* was followed

by *Truth*, *Table Talk*, *Expostulation*, *Hope*, *Charity*, *Conversation*, and *Retirement*. When the series was published, *Table Talk* was put first, being supposed to be the lightest and the most attractive to an unregenerate world. The judgment passed upon this set of poems at the time by the *Critical Review* seems blasphemous to the fond biographer, and is so devoid of modern smartness as to be almost interesting as a literary fossil. But it must be deemed essentially just, though the reviewer errs, as many reviewers have erred, in measuring the writer's capacity by the standard of his first performance. "These poems," said the *Critical Review*, "are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities or the power of genius requisite for so arduous an undertaking. . . . . He says what is incontrovertible and what has been said over and over again with much gravity, but says nothing new, sprightly or entertaining; travelling on a plain level flat road, with great composure almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon in very indifferent verse on Truth, the Progress of Error, Charity, and some other grave subjects. If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some more becoming disguise, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its beauty; for as this bard himself sweetly sings:—

> The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
> Falls soporific on the listless ear."

In justice to the bard it ought to be said that he wrote under the eye of the Rev. John Newton, to whom the design had been duly submitted, and who had given his *imprimatur* in the shape of a preface which took Johnson the publisher aback by its gravity. Newton would not have sanctioned any poetry which had not a distinctly religious object, and he received an assurance from the poet that the lively passages were introduced only as honey on the rim of the medicinal cup, to commend its healing contents to the lips of a giddy world. The Rev. John Newton must have been exceedingly austere if he thought that the quantity of honey used was excessive.

A genuine desire to make society better is always present in these poems, and its presence lends them the only interest which they possess except as historical monuments of a religious movement. Of satirical vigour they have scarcely a semblance. There are three kinds of satire, corresponding to as many different views of humanity and life; the Stoical, the Cynical, and the Epicurean. Of Stoical satire, with its strenuous hatred of vice and wrong, the type is Juvenal. Of Cynical satire, springing from bitter contempt of humanity, the type is Swift's Gulliver, while its quintessence is embodied in his lines on the Day of Judgment. Of Epicurean satire, flowing from a contempt of humanity which is not bitter, and lightly playing with the weakness and vanities of mankind, Horace is the classical example. To the first two kinds, Cowper's nature was totally alien, and when he attempts anything in either of those lines, the only

result is a querulous and censorious acerbity, in which his real feelings had no part, and which on mature reflection offended his own better taste. In the Horatian kind he might have excelled, as the episode of the *Retired Statesman* in one of these poems shows. He might have excelled, that is, if like Horace he had known the world. But he did not know the world. He saw the "great Babel" only "through the loopholes of retreat," and in the columns of his weekly newspaper. Even during the years, long past, which he spent in the world, his experience had been confined to a small literary circle. Society was to him an abstraction on which he discoursed like a pulpiteer. His satiric whip not only has no lash, it is brandished in the air.

No man was ever less qualified for the office of a censor; his judgment is at once disarmed, and a breach in his principles is at once made by the slightest personal influence. Bishops are bad; they are like the Cretans, evil beasts and slow bellies; but the bishop whose brother Cowper knows is a blessing to the Church. Deans and Canons are lazy sinecurists, but there is a bright exception in the case of the Cowper who held a golden stall at Durham. Grinding India is criminal, but Warren Hastings is acquitted, because he was with Cowper at Westminster. Discipline was deplorably relaxed in all colleges except that of which Cowper's brother was a fellow. Pluralities and resignation bonds, the grossest abuses of the Church, were perfectly defensible in the case of any friend or acquaintance of this Church Reformer. Bitter lines against Popery inserted in *The Task* were struck out, because the writer had made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton, who were Roman Catholics. Smoking

was detestable, except when practised by dear Mr. Bull. Even gambling, the blackest sin of fashionable society, is not to prevent Fox, the great Whig, from being a ruler in Israel. Besides, in all his social judgments, Cowper is at a wrong point of view. He is always deluded by the idol of his cave. He writes perpetually on the twofold assumption that a life of retirement is more favourable to virtue than a life of action, and that "God made the country, while man made the town." Both parts of the assumption are untrue. A life of action is more favourable to virtue, as a rule, than a life of retirement, and the development of humanity is higher and richer, as a rule, in the town than in the country. If Cowper's retirement was virtuous, it was so because he was actively employed in the exercise of his highest faculties: had he been a mere idler, secluded from his kind, his retirement would not have been virtuous at all. His flight from the world was rendered necessary by his malady, and respectable by his literary work; but it was a flight and not a victory. His misconception was fostered and partly produced by a religion which was essentially ascetic, and which, while it gave birth to characters of the highest and most energetic beneficence, represented salvation too little as the reward of effort, too much as the reward of passive belief and of spiritual emotion.

The most readable of the Moral Satires is *Retirement*, in which the writer is on his own ground expressing his genuine feelings, and which is, in fact, a foretaste of *The Task*. *Expostulation*, a warning to England from the example of the Jews, is the best constructed: the rest are totally wanting in unity, and even in connexion. In all there are flashes of epigrammatic smartness.

How shall I speak thee, or thy power address,
Thou God of our idolatry, the press?
By thee, religion, liberty, and laws
Exert their influence, and advance their cause;
By thee, worse plagues than Pharaoh's land befel,
Diffused, make earth the vestibule of hell:
Thou fountain, at which drink the good and wise,
Thou ever-bubbling spring of endless lies,
Like Eden's dread probationary tree,
Knowledge of good and evil is from thee.

Occasionally there are passages of higher merit. The episode of statesmen in *Retirement* has been already mentioned. The lines on the two disciples going to Emmaus in *Conversation*, though little more than a paraphrase of the Gospel narrative, convey pleasantly the Evangelical idea of the Divine Friend. Cowper says in one of his letters that he had been intimate with a man of fine taste who had confessed to him that though he could not subscribe to the truth of Christianity itself, he could never read this passage of St. Luke without being deeply affected by it, and feeling that if the stamp of divinity was impressed upon anything in the Scriptures, it was upon that passage.

It happen'd on a solemn eventide,
Soon after He that was our surety died,
Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind,
Sought their own village, busied as they went
In musings worthy of the great event:
They spake of him they loved, of him whose life,
Though blameless, had incurr'd perpetual strife,
Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,
A deep memorial graven on their hearts.
The recollection, like a vein of ore,
The farther traced enrich'd them still the more;

They thought him, and they justly thought him, one
Sent to do more than he appear'd to have done,
To exalt a people, and to place them high
Above all else, and wonder'd he should die.
Ere yet they brought their journey to an end,
A stranger join'd them, courteous as a friend,
And ask'd them with a kind engaging air
What their affliction was, and begg'd a share.
Inform'd, he gather'd up the broken thread,
And truth and wisdom gracing all he said,
Explain'd, illustrated, and search'd so well
The tender theme on which they chose to dwell,
That reaching home, the night, they said is near,
We must not now be parted, sojourn here.—
The new acquaintance soon became a guest,
And made so welcome at their simple feast,
He bless'd the bread, but vanish'd at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, 'Twas the Lord!
Did not our hearts feel all he deign'd to say,
Did they not burn within us by the way?

The prude going to morning church in *Truth* is a good rendering of Hogarth's picture :—

Yon ancient prude, whose wither'd features show
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinion'd close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eyebrows arch'd, her eyes both gone astray
To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
With bony and unkerchief'd neck defies
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs
Daily at clink of bell, to morning prayers.
To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind;
The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dew-drop at his nose,
His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages are yet doom'd to share;

> Carries her Bible tuck'd beneath his arm,
> And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.

Of personal allusions there are a few; if the satirist had not been prevented from indulging in them by his taste, he would have been debarred by his ignorance. Lord Chesterfield, as the incarnation of the world and the most brilliant servant of the arch-enemy, comes in for a lashing under the name of Petronius.

> Petronius! all the muses weep for thee,
> But every tear shall scald thy memory.
> The graces too, while virtue at their shrine
> Lay bleeding under that soft hand of thine,
> Felt each a mortal stab in her own breast,
> Abhorr'd the sacrifice, and cursed the priest.
> Thou polish'd and high-finish'd foe to truth,
> Gray-beard corrupter of our listening youth,
> To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
> That so refined it might the more entice,
> Then pour it on the morals of thy son
> To taint *his* heart, was worthy of *thine own*.

This is about the nearest approach to Juvenal that the Evangelical satirist ever makes. In *Hope* there is a vehement vindication of the memory of Whitefield. It is rather remarkable that there is no mention of Wesley. But Cowper belonged to the Evangelical rather than to the Methodist section. It may be doubted whether the living Whitefield would have been much to his taste.

In the versification of the moral satires there are frequent faults, especially in the earlier poems of the series; though Cowper's power of writing musical verse is attested both by the occasional poems and by *The Task*.

With the Moral Satires may be coupled, though written later, *Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools*. Here Cowper has the advantage of treating a subject which he understood, about which he felt strongly, and desired for a practical purpose to stir the feelings of his readers. He set to work in bitter earnest. "There is a sting," he says, "in verse that prose neither has nor can have; and I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should be opened if possible to perceive it." His descriptions of the miseries which children in his day endured, and, in spite of all our improvements, must still to some extent endure in boarding schools, and of the effects of the system in estranging boys from their parents and deadening home affections, are vivid and true. Of course the Public School system was not to be overturned by rhyming, but the author of *Tirocinium* awakened attention to its faults, and probably did something towards amending them. The best lines, perhaps, have been already quoted in connexion with the history of the writer's boyhood. There are, however, other telling passages such as that on the indiscriminate use of emulation as a stimulus :—

> Our public hives of puerile resort
> That are of chief and most approved report,
> To such base hopes in many a sordid soul
> Owe their repute in part, but not the whole.
> A principle, whose proud pretensions pass
> Unquestion'd, though the jewel be but glass,
> That with a world not often over-nice
> Ranks as a virtue, and is yet a vice,

Or rather a gross compound, justly tried,
Of envy, hatred, jealousy, and pride,
Contributes most perhaps to enhance their fame,
And Emulation is its precious name.
Boys once on fire with that contentious zeal
Feel all the rage that female rivals feel;
The prize of beauty in a woman's eyes
Not brighter than in theirs the scholar's prize.
The spirit of that competition burns
With all varieties of ill by turns,
Each vainly magnifies his own success,
Resents his fellow's, wishes it were less,
Exults in his miscarriage if he fail,
Deems his reward too great if he prevail,
And labours to surpass him day and night,
Less for improvement, than to tickle spite.
The spur is powerful, and I grant its force;
It pricks the genius forward in its course,
Allows short time for play, and none for sloth,
And felt alike by each, advances both,
But judge where so much evil intervenes,
The end, though plausible, not worth the means.
Weigh, for a moment, classical desert
Against a heart depraved and temper hurt,
Hurt, too, perhaps for life, for early wrong
Done to the nobler part, affects it long,
And you are staunch indeed in learning's cause,
If you can crown a discipline that draws
Such mischiefs after it, with much applause.

He might have done more, if he had been able to point to the alternative of a good day school, as a combination of home affections with the superior teaching hardly to be found, except in a large school, and which Cowper, in drawing his comparison between the two systems, fails to take into account.

To the same general class of poems belongs *Anti-Thelypthora*, which it is due to Cowper's memory to say

was not published in his lifetime. It is an angry pasquinade on an absurd book advocating polygamy on Biblical grounds, by the Rev. Martin Madan, Cowper's quondam spiritual counsellor. Alone among Cowper's works it has a taint of coarseness.

The Moral Satires pleased Franklin, to whom their social philosophy was congenial, as at a later day, in common with all Cowper's works, they pleased Cobden, who no doubt specially relished the passage in *Charity*, embodying the philanthropic sentiment of Free Trade. There was a trembling consultation as to the expediency of bringing the volume under the notice of Johnson. "One of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies and spoil the sale." "I think it would be well to send in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such an one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration." Fear prevailed; but it seems that the book found its way into the dictator's hands, that his judgment on it was kind, and that he even did something to temper the wind of adverse criticism to the shorn lamb. Yet parts of it were likely to incur his displeasure as a Tory, as a Churchman, and as one who greatly preferred Fleet Street to the beauties of nature; while with the sentimental misery of the writer, he could have had no sympathy whatever. Of the incompleteness of Johnson's view of character there could be no better instance than the charming weakness of Cowper. Thurlow and Colman did not even acknowledge their copies, and were lashed for their breach of friendship with

rather more vigour than the Moral Satires display, in *The Valedictory*, which unluckily survived for posthumous publication when the culprits had made their peace.

Cowper certainly misread himself if he believed that ambition, even literary ambition, was a large element in his character. But having published, he felt a keen interest in the success of his publication. Yet he took its failure and the adverse criticism very calmly. With all his sensitiveness, from irritable and suspicious egotism, such as is the most common cause of moral madness, he was singularly free. In this respect his philosophy served him well.

It may safely be said that the Moral Satires would have sunk into oblivion if they had not been buoyed up by *The Task*.

CHAPTER V.

THE TASK.

Mrs. Unwin's influence produced the Moral Satires. *The Task* was born of a more potent inspiration. One day Mrs. Jones, the wife of a neighbouring clergyman, came into Olney to shop, and with her came her sister, Lady Austen, the widow of a Baronet, a woman of the world, who had lived much in France, gay, sparkling and vivacious, but at the same time full of feeling even to overflowing. The apparition acted like magic on the recluse. He desired Mrs. Unwin to ask the two ladies to stay to tea, then shrank from joining the party which he had himself invited, ended by joining it, and, his shyness giving way with a rush, engaged in animated conversation with Lady Austen, and walked with her part of the way home. On her an equally great effect appears to have been produced. A warm friendship at once sprang up, and before long Lady Austen had verses addressed to her as Sister Anne. Her ladyship, on her part, was smitten with a great love of retirement, and at the same time with great admiration for Mr. Scott, the curate of Olney, as a preacher, and she resolved to fit up for herself "that part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife and child, and a thousand rats." That a woman of fashion, accustomed to French

salons, should choose such an abode, with a pair of Puritans for her only society, seems to show that one of the Puritans at least must have possessed great powers of attraction. Better quarters were found for her in the Vicarage; and the private way between the gardens, which apparently had been closed since Newton's departure, was opened again.

Lady Austen's presence evidently wrought on Cowper like an elixir: "From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he writes to Mrs. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's Chateau. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the evening wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both." It was perhaps while he was winding thread that Lady Austen told him the story of John Gilpin. He lay awake at night laughing over it, and next morning produced the ballad. It soon became famous, and was recited by Henderson, a popular actor, on the stage, though, as its gentility was doubtful, its author withheld his name. He afterwards fancied that this wonderful piece of humour had been written in a mood of the deepest depression. Probably he had written it in an interval of high spirits between two such moods. Moreover he sometimes exaggerated his own misery. He will begin a letter with a *de profundis*, and towards the end forget his sorrows, glide into commonplace topics, and write about them in

the ordinary strain. Lady Austen inspired *John Gilpin.* She inspired, it seems, the lines on the loss of the Royal George. She did more: she invited Cowper to try his hand at something considerable in blank verse. When he asked her for a subject, she was happier in her choice than the lady who had suggested the *Progress of Error.* She bade him take the sofa on which she was reclining, and which, sofas being then uncommon, was a more striking and suggestive object than it would be now. The right chord was struck; the subject was accepted; and *The Sofa* grew into *The Task;* the title of the song reminding us that it was "commanded by the fair." As *Paradise Lost* is to militant Puritanism, so is *The Task* to the religious movement of its author's time. To its character as the poem of a sect it no doubt owed and still owes much of its popularity. Not only did it give beautiful and effective expression to the sentiments of a large religious party, but it was about the only poetry that a strict Methodist or Evangelical could read; while to those whose worship was unritualistic and who were debarred by their principles from the theatre and the concert, anything in the way of art that was not illicit must have been eminently welcome. But *The Task* has merits of a more universal and enduring kind. Its author himself says of it:—"If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect, however, I do not think it altogether indefensible), it may yet boast, that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency, to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to

the cause of piety and virtue." A regular plan, assuredly, *The Task* has not. It rambles through a vast variety of subjects, religious, political, social, philosophical, and horticultural, with as little of method as its author used in taking his morning walks. Nor as Mr. Benham has shown, are the reflections, as a rule, naturally suggested by the preceding passage. From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those, who being free from gout, do not need sofas,—and so to country walks and country life is hardly a natural transition. It is hardly a natural transition from the ice palace built by a Russian despot, to despotism and politics in general. But if Cowper deceives himself in fancying that there is a plan or a close connexion of parts, he is right as to the existence of a pervading tendency. The praise of retirement and of country life as most friendly to piety and virtue, is the perpetual refrain of *The Task*, if not its definite theme. From this idea immediately flow the best and the most popular passages: those which please apart from anything peculiar to a religious school; those which keep the poem alive; those which have found their way into the heart of the nation, and intensified the taste for rural and domestic happiness, to which they most winningly appeal. In these Cowper pours out his inmost feelings, with the liveliness of exhilaration, enhanced by contrast with previous misery. The pleasures of the country and of home, the walk, the garden, but above all the "intimate delights" of the winter evening, the snug parlour, with its close-drawn curtains shutting out the stormy night, the steaming and bubbling tea-urn, the cheerful circle, the book read aloud, the newspaper through which we look out into the unquiet world, are painted by the writer

with a heartfelt enjoyment, which infects the reader. These are not the joys of a hero, nor are they the joys of an Alcæus "singing amidst the clash of arms, or when he had moored on the wet shore his storm-tost barque." But they are pure joys, and they present themselves in competition with those of Ranelagh and the Basset Table, which are not heroic or even masculine, any more than they are pure.

The well-known passages at the opening of *The Winter Evening*, are the self-portraiture of a soul in bliss—such bliss as that soul could know—and the poet would have found it very difficult to depict to himself by the utmost effort of his religious imagination any paradise which he would really have enjoyed more.

> Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
> And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
> That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
> So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
>
> * * * *
>
> This folio of four pages, happy work!
> Which not even critics criticise, that holds
> Inquisitive attention while I read
> Fast bound in chains of silence, which the fair,
> Though eloquent themselves, yet fear to break,
> What is it but a map of busy life,
> Its fluctuations and its vast concerns?
>
> * * * *
>
> 'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat
> To peep at such a world. To see the stir
> Of the great Babel and not feel the crowd.
> To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
> At a safe distance, where the dying sound
> Falls a soft murmur on the injured ear.

Thus sitting and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced
To some secure and more than mortal height,
That liberates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view, turns round
With all its generations; I behold
The tumult and am still The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me,
Grieves but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice that make man a wolf to man,
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats
By which he speaks the language of his heart,
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.
He travels and expatiates, as the bee
From flower to flower, so he from land to land;
The manners, customs, policy of all
Pay contribution to the store he gleans;
He sucks intelligence in every clime,
And spreads the honey of his deep research
At his return, a rich repast for me.
He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes
Discover countries, with a kindred heart
Suffer his woes and share in his escapes,
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.
Oh winter! ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet like ashes fill'd,
Thy breath congeal'd upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age; thy forehead wrapt in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car indebted to no wheels,
And urged by storms along its slippery way;
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art. Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning East,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him impatient of his stay
Down to the rosy West. But kindly still

> Compensating his loss with added hours
> Of social converse and instructive ease,
> And gathering at short notice in one group
> The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
> Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
> I crown thee king of intimate delights,
> Fire-side enjoyments, home-born happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturb'd retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.

The writer of *The Task* also deserves the crown which he has himself claimed as a close observer and truthful painter of nature. In this respect, he challenges comparison with Thomson. The range of Thomson is far wider; he paints nature in all her moods, Cowper only in a few and those the gentlest, though he has said of himself that "he was always an admirer of thunder-storms, even before he knew whose voice be heard in them, but especially of thunder rolling over the great waters." The great waters he had not seen for many years; he had never, so far as we know, seen mountains, hardly even high hills; his only landscape was the flat country watered by the Ouse. On the other hand he is perfectly genuine, thoroughly English, entirely emancipated from false Arcadianism, the yoke of which still sits heavily upon Thomson, whose "muse" moreover is perpetually "wafting" him away from the country and the climate which he knows to countries and climates which he does not know, and which he describes in the style of a prize poem. Cowper's landscapes, too, are peopled with the peasantry of England; Thomson's, with Damons, Palæmons, and Musidoras, tricked out in the sentimental costume of the sham idyl. In Thomson, you always find the effort of the artist working up a

description; in Cowper, you find no effort; the scene is simply mirrored on a mind of great sensibility and high pictorial power.

> And witness, dear companion of my walks,
> Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
> Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love,
> Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth
> And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire—
> Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
> Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere,
> And that my raptures are not conjured up
> To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
> But genuine, and art partner of them all.
> How oft upon yon eminence our pace
> Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne
> The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,
> While Admiration, feeding at the eye,
> And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene!
> Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned
> The distant plough slow moving, and beside
> His labouring team that swerved not from the track,
> The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!
> Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
> Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er,
> Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
> Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
> Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,
> That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
> While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
> That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
> The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
> Displaying on its varied side the grace
> Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
> Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
> Just undulates upon the listening ear,
> Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.
> Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,
> Please daily, and whose novelty survives
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—
> Praise justly due to those that I describe.

This is evidently genuine and spontaneous. We stand with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin on the hill in the ruffling wind, like them, scarcely conscious that it blows, and feed admiration at the eye upon the rich and thoroughly English champaign that is outspread below.

> Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
> Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
> The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
> *That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood*
> *Of ancient growth, make music not unlike*
> *The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,*
> And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;
> Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
> And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
> Nor less composure waits upon the roar
> Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
> Of neighbouring fountain, or of *rills that slip*
> *Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall*
> *Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length*
> *In matted grass that with a livelier green*
> *Betrays the secret of their silent course.*
> Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
> But animated nature sweeter still,
> To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
> Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
> The livelong night: nor these alone, whose notes
> Nice-finger'd Art must emulate in vain,
> But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
> In still-repeated circles, screaming loud,
> The jay, the pie, and e'en the boding owl
> That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.
> Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
> Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
> And only there, please highly for their sake.

Affection such as the last lines display for the inharmonious as well as the harmonious, for the uncomely, as well as the comely parts of nature has been made

familiar by Wordsworth, but it was new in the time of Cowper. Let us compare a landscape painted by Pope in his Windsor forest, with the lines just quoted, and we shall see the difference between the art of Cowper, and that of the Augustan age.

> Here waving groves a checkered scene display,
> And part admit and part exclude the day,
> As some coy nymph her lover's warm address
> Not quite indulges, nor can quite repress.
> There interspersed in lawns and opening glades
> The trees arise that share each other's shades;
> Here in full light the russet plains extend,
> There wrapt in clouds, the bluish hills ascend,
> E'en the wild heath displays her purple dyes,
> And midst the desert fruitful fields arise,
> That crowned with tufted trees and springing corn,
> Like verdant isles the sable waste adorn.

The low Berkshire hills wrapt in clouds on a sunny day; a sable desert in the neighbourhood of Windsor; fruitful fields arising in it, and crowned with tufted trees and springing corn—evidently Pope saw all this, not on an eminence, in the ruffling wind, but in his study with his back to the window, and the Georgics or a translation of them before him.

Here again is a little picture of rural life from the *Winter Morning Walk.*

> The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence
> Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
> *In unrecumbent sadness.* There they wait
> Their wonted fodder; not like hungering man,
> Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,
> And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.
> *He from the stack carves out the accustomed load.*

Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft,
His broad keen knife into the solid mass:
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,
With such undeviating and even force
He severs it away: no needless care,
Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.
Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
The cheerful haunts of man; to wield the axe
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve, his solitary task.
Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow; and now, with many a frisk
Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught
But now and then with pressure of his thumb
To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
That fumes beneath his nose: the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.

The minutely faithful description of the man carving the load of hay out of the stack, and again those of the gambolling dog, and the woodman smoking his pipe with the stream of smoke trailing behind him, remind us of the touches of minute fidelity in Homer. The same may be said of many other passages.

The sheepfold here
Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.
At first, progressive as a stream they seek
The middle field: but, scatter'd by degrees,
Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.
There from the sun-burnt hay-field homeward creeps

The loaded wain: while lighten'd of its charge,
The wain that meets it passes swiftly by;
The boorish driver leaning o'er his team
Vociferous and impatient of delay.

A specimen of more imaginative and distinctly poetical description is the well-known passage on evening, in writing which Cowper would seem to have had Collins in his mind.

Come, Evening, once again, season of peace;
Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
With matron-step slow-moving, while the Night
Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employed
In letting fall the curtain of repose
On bird and beast, the other charged for man
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day:
Not sumptuously adorn'd, nor needing aid,
Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems!
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow
Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high
With ostentatious pageantry, but set
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.

Beyond this line Cowper does not go, and had no idea of going; he never thinks of lending a soul to material nature as Wordsworth and Shelley do. He is the poetic counterpart of Gainsborough, as the great descriptive poets of a later and more spiritual day are the counterparts of Turner. We have said that Cowper's peasants are genuine as well as his landscape; he might have been a more exquisite Crabbe if he had turned his mind that way, instead of writing sermons about a world which to him was little more than an abstraction, distorted moreover, and discoloured by his religious asceticism.

Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,
Such claim compassion in a night like this,
And have a friend in every feeling heart.
Warm'd, while it lasts, by labour, all day long
They brave the season, and yet find at eve,
Ill clad, and fed but sparely, time to cool.
The frugal housewife trembles when she lights
Her scanty stock of brushwood, blazing clear,
But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys.
The few small embers left, she nurses well;
And, while her infant race, with outspread hands
And crowded knees sit cowering o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd.
The man feels least, as more inured than she
To winter, and the current in his veins
More briskly moved by his severer toil;
Yet he too finds his own distress in theirs.
The taper soon extinguish'd, which I saw
Dangled along at the cold finger's end
Just when the day declined; and the brown loaf
Lodged on the shelf, half eaten without sauce
Of savoury cheese, or butter, costlier still:
Sleep seems their only refuge: for, alas!
Where penury is felt the thought is chained,
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few!
With all this thrift they thrive not. All the care
Ingenious Parsimony takes, but just
Saves the small inventory, bed and stool,
Skillet, and old carved chest, from public sale.
They live, and live without extorted alms
From grudging hands: but other boast have none
To soothe their honest pride that scorns to beg,
Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love.

Here we have the plain, unvarnished record of visitings among the poor of Olney. The last two lines are simple truth as well as the rest.

"In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical." In the second book of

The Task, there are some bitter things about the clergy, and in the passage pourtraying a fashionable preacher, there is a touch of satiric vigour, or rather of that power of comic description which was one of the writer's gifts. But of Cowper as a satirist enough has been said.

"What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance, and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience." The passages of *The Task* penned by conscience, taken together, form a lamentably large proportion of the poem. An ordinary reader can be carried through them, if at all, only by his interest in the history of opinion, or by the companionship of the writer, who is always present, as Walton is in his Angler, as White is in his Selbourne. Cowper, however, even at his worst, is a highly cultivated methodist; if he is sometimes enthusiastic, and possibly superstitious, he is never coarse or unctuous. He speaks with contempt of "the twang of the conventicle." Even his enthusiasm had by this time been somewhat tempered. Just after his conversion he used to preach to everybody. He had found out, as he tells us himself, that this was a mistake, that "the pulpit was for preaching; the garden, the parlour, and the walk abroad were for friendly and agreeable conversation." It may have been his consciousness of a certain change in himself that deterred him from taking Newton into his confidence

when he was engaged upon *The Task*. The worst passages are those which betray a fanatical antipathy to natural science, especially that in the third book (150—190). The episode of the judgment of heaven on the young atheist Misagathus, in the sixth book, is also fanatical and repulsive.

Puritanism had come into violent collision with the temporal power, and had contracted a character fiercely political and revolutionary. Methodism fought only against unbelief, vice, and the coldness of the establishment; it was in no way political, much less revolutionary; by the recoil from the atheism of the French Revolution its leaders, including Wesley himself, were drawn rather to the Tory side. Cowper, we have said, always remained in principle what he had been born, a Whig, an unrevolutionary Whig, an "Old Whig" to adopt the phrase made canonical by Burke.

> 'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
> Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
> And we are weeds without it. All constraint
> Except what wisdom lays on evil men
> Is evil.

The sentiment of these lines, which were familiar and dear to Cobden, is tempered by judicious professions of loyalty to a king who rules in accordance with the law. At one time Cowper was inclined to regard the government of George III. as a repetition of that of Charles I., absolutist in the State and reactionary in the Church; but the progress of revolutionary opinions evidently increased his loyalty, as it did that of many other Whigs, to the good Tory king. We shall presently see, however, that the views of the French Revolution itself expressed

in his letters are wonderfully rational, calm, and free from the political panic and the apocalyptic hallucination, both of which we should rather have expected to find in him. He describes himself to Newton as having been, since his second attack of madness, "an extramundane character with reference to this globe, and though not a native of the moon, not made of the dust of this planet." The Evangelical party has remained down to the present day non-political, and in its own estimation extramundane, taking part in the affairs of the nation only when some religious object was directly in view. In speaking of the family of nations, an Evangelical poet is of course a preacher of peace and human brotherhood. He has even in some lines of *Charity*, which also were dear to Cobden, remarkably anticipated the sentiment of modern economists respecting the influence of free trade in making one nation of mankind. The passage is defaced by an atrociously bad simile :—

> Again—the band of commerce was design'd,
> To associate all the branches of mankind,
> And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
> Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.
> Wise to promote whatever end he means,
> God opens fruitful Nature's various scenes,
> Each climate needs what other climes produce,
> And offers something to the general use;
> No land but listens to the common call,
> And in return receives supply from all.
> This genial intercourse and mutual aid
> Cheers what were else an universal shade.
> Calls Nature from her ivy-mantled den,
> And softens human rock-work into men.

Now and then, however, in reading *The Task*, we come across a dash of warlike patriotism which, amidst the

general philanthropy, surprises and offends the reader's palate, like the taste of garlic in our butter.

An innocent Epicurism, tempered by religious asceticism of a mild kind—such is the philosophy of *The Task*, and such the ideal embodied in the portrait of the happy man with which it concludes. Whatever may be said of the religious asceticism, the Epicurism required a corrective to redeem it from selfishness and guard it against self-deceit. This solitary was serving humanity in the best way he could, not by his prayers, as in one rather fanatical passage he suggests, but by his literary work; he had need also to remember that humanity was serving him. The newspaper through which he looks out so complacently into the great "Babel," has been printed in the great Babel itself, and brought by the poor postman, with his "spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks," to the recluse sitting comfortably by his fireside. The "fragrant lymph" poured by "the fair" for their companion in his cosy seclusion, has been brought over the sea by the trader, who must encounter the moral dangers of a trader's life, as well as the perils of the stormy wave. It is delivered at the door by

> The waggoner who bears
> The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night,
> With half-shut eyes and puckered cheeks and teeth
> Presented bare against the storm;

and whose coarseness and callousness, as he whips his team, are the consequences of the hard calling in which he ministers to the recluse's pleasure and refinement. If town life has its evils, from the city comes all that makes retirement comfortable and civilized. Retirement with-

out the city would have been bookless and have fed on acorns.

Rousseau is conscious of the necessity of some such institution as slavery, by way of basis for his beautiful life according to nature. The celestial purity and felicity of St. Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* are sustained by the labour of two faithful slaves. A weak point of Cowper's philosophy, taken apart from his own saving activity as a poet, betrays itself in a somewhat similar way.

> Or if the garden with its many cares
> All well repaid demand him, he attends
> The welcome call, conscious how much the hand
> Of lubbard labour, needs his watchful eye,
> Oft loitering lazily if not o'er seen;
> Or misapplying his unskilful strength
> But much performs himself, *no works indeed*
> *That ask robust tough sinews bred to toil,*
> *Servile employ*, but such as may amuse
> Not tire, demanding rather skill than force.

We are told in *The Task* that there is no sin in allowing our own happiness to be enhanced by contrast with the less happy condition of others: if we are doing our best to increase the happiness of others, there is none. Cowper, as we have said before, was doing this to the utmost of his limited capacity.

Both in the Moral Satires and in *The Task*, there are sweeping denunciations of amusements which we now justly deem innocent, and without which or something equivalent to them, the wrinkles on the brow of care could not be smoothed nor life preserved from dulness and moroseness. There is fanaticism in this no doubt: but in justice to the Methodist as well as to the Puritan, let it be remembered that the stage, card parties,

and even dancing once had in them something from which even the most liberal morality might recoil.

In his writings generally, but especially in *The Task*, Cowper, besides being an apostle of virtuous retirement and evangelical piety, is, by his general tone, an apostle of sensibility. *The Task* is a perpetual protest not only against the fashionable vices and the irreligion, but against the hardness of the world; and in a world which worshipped Chesterfield the protest was not needless, nor was it ineffective. Among the most tangible characteristics of this special sensibility is the tendency of its brimming love of humankind to overflow upon animals; and of this there are marked instances in some passages of *The Task*.

> I would not enter on my list of friends
> (Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
> Yet wanting sensibility) the man
> Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

Of Cowper's sentimentalism (to use the word in a neutral sense), part flowed from his own temperament, part was Evangelical, but part belonged to an element which was European, which produced the *Nouvelle Heloise* and the *Sorrows of Werther*, and which was found among the Jacobins in sinister companionship with the cruel frenzy of the Revolution. Cowper shows us several times that he had been a reader of Rousseau, nor did he fail to produce in his time a measure of the same effect which Rousseau produced; though there have been so many sentimentalists since, and the vein has been so much worked, that it is difficult to carry ourselves back in imagination to the day in which Parisian ladies could

forego balls to read the *Nouvelle Heloise*, or the stony heart of people of the world could be melted by *The Task*.

In his versification, as in his descriptions, Cowper flattered himself that he imitated no one. But he manifestly imitates the softer passages of Milton, whose music he compares in a rapturous passage of one of his letters to that of a fine organ. To produce melody and variety, he, like Milton, avails himself fully of all the resources of a composite language. Blank verse confined to short Anglo-Saxon words is apt to strike the ear, not like the swell of an organ, but like the tinkle of a musical-box.

The Task made Cowper famous. He was told that he had sixty readers at the Hague alone. The interest of his relations and friends in him revived, and those of whom he had heard nothing for many years emulously renewed their connexion. Colman and Thurlow reopened their correspondence with him, Colman writing to him "like a brother." Disciples, young Mr. Rose, for instance, came to sit at his feet. Complimentary letters were sent to him, and poems submitted to his judgment. His portrait was taken by famous painters. Literary lion-hunters began to fix their eyes upon him. His renown spread even to Olney. The clerk of All Saints', Northampton, came over to ask him to write the verses annually appended to the bill of mortality for that parish. Cowper suggested that "there were several men of genius in Northampton, particularly Mr. Cox, the statuary, who, as everybody knew, was a first-rate maker of verses." "Alas!" replied the clerk, "I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him." The compliment was irresistible, and for seven years the

author of *The Task* wrote the mortuary verses for All Saints', Northampton. Amusement, not profit, was Cowper's aim; he rather rashly gave away his copyright to his publisher, and his success does not seem to have brought him money in a direct way; but it brought him a pension of 300*l.* in the end. In the meantime it brought him presents, and among them an annual gift of 50*l.* from an anonymous hand, the first instalment being accompanied by a pretty snuff-box ornamented with a picture of the three hares. From the gracefulness of the gift, Southey infers that it came from a woman, and he conjectures that the woman was Theodora.

CHAPTER VI.

SHORT POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS.

The Task was not quite finished when the influence which had inspired it was withdrawn. Among the little mysteries and scandals of literary history is the rupture between Cowper and Lady Austen. Soon after the commencement of their friendship there had been a "fracas," of which Cowper gives an account in a letter to William Unwin. "My letters have already apprised you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Anne Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and, because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it; conscious of none but the most upright, inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time, but at length,

having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence; it received, indeed, an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world and great experience of its folly, but, above all, whose sense of religion and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety she is a great thinker) induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marked our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add that by her own desire, I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister. *Ceu fumus in auras.*" It is impossible to read this without suspecting that there was more of "romance" on one side, than there was either of romance or of consciousness of the situation on the other. On that occasion the reconciliation, though "impossible," took place, the lady sending, by way of

olive branch, a pair of ruffles, which it was known she had begun to work before the quarrel. The second rupture was final. Hayley, who treats the matter with sad solemnity, tells us that Cowper's letter of farewell to Lady Austen, as she assured him herself, was admirable, though unluckily, not being gratified by it at the time, she had thrown it into the fire. Cowper has himself given us, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, with reference to the final rupture, a version of the whole affair:—"There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would feel such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice at length obtained of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls aforesaid, by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all; a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having pub-

lished my first volume and not begun my second) to pay my *devoirs* to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon became laws. I began *The Task*, for she was the lady who gave me the *Sofa* for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten; and the intervening hour was all the time I could find in the whole day for writing, and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which was at first optional a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol." Evidently this was not the whole account of the matter, or there would have been no need for a formal letter of farewell. We are very sorry to find the revered Mr. Alexander Knox saying, in his correspondence with Bishop Jebb, that he had a severer idea of Lady Austen than he should wish to put into writing for publication, and that he almost suspected she was a very artful woman. On the other hand, the unsentimental Mr. Scott is reported to have said, "Who can be surprised that two women should be continually in the society of one man and quarrel, sooner or later, with each other?" Considering what Mrs. Unwin had been to Cowper, and what he had been to her, a little jealousy on her part would not have been highly criminal. But, as Southey observes, we shall soon see two women continually in the society of this very man without quarrelling with each other. That Lady Austen's

behaviour to Mrs. Unwin was in the highest degree affectionate, Cowper has himself assured us. Whatever the cause may have been, this bird of paradise, having alighted for a moment in Olney, took wing and was seen no more.

Her place, as a companion, was supplied, and more than supplied, by Lady Hesketh, like her a woman of the world, and almost as bright and vivacious, but with more sense and stability of character, and who, moreover, could be treated as a sister without any danger of misunderstanding. The renewal of the intercourse between Cowper and the merry and affectionate play-fellow of his early days, had been one of the best fruits borne to him by *The Task*, or perhaps we should rather say by *John Gilpin*, for on reading that ballad she first became aware that her cousin had emerged from the dark seclusion of his truly Christian happiness, and might again be capable of intercourse with her sunny nature. Full of real happiness for Cowper were her visits to Olney; the announcement of her coming threw him into a trepidation of delight. And how was this new rival received by Mrs. Unwin. "There is something," says Lady Hesketh in a letter which has been already quoted, "truly affectionate and sincere in Mrs. Unwin's manner. No one can express more heartily than she does her joy to have me at Olney; and as this must be for his sake it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him." She could even cheerfully yield precedence in trifles, which is the greatest trial of all. "Our friend," says Lady Hesketh, "delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say that he and I always spread ourselves out in them,

leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is." She never gave the slightest reason for doubting her sincerity; so Mr. Scott's coarse theory of the "two women" falls to the ground, though, as Lady Hesketh was not Lady Austen, room is still left for the more delicate and interesting hypothesis.

By Lady Hesketh's care Cowper was at last taken out of the "well" at Olney and transferred with his partner to a house at Weston, a place in the neighbourhood, but on higher ground, more cheerful, and in better air. The house at Weston belonged to Mr. Throckmorton of Weston Hall, with whom and Mrs. Throckmorton, Cowper had become so intimate that they were already his Mr. and Mrs. Frog. It is a proof of his freedom from fanatical bitterness that he was rather drawn to them by their being Roman Catholics, and having suffered rude treatment from the Protestant boors of the neighbourhood. Weston Hall had its grounds, with the colonnade of chestnuts, the "sportive light" of which still "dances" on the pages of *The Task;* with the Wilderness,—

> Whose well-rolled walks,
> With curvature of slow and easy sweep,
> Deception innocent, give ample space
> To narrow bounds—

with the Grove,—

> Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms
> We may discern the thresher at his task,

> Thump after thump resounds the constant flail
> That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
> Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff,
> The rustling straw sends up a fragrant mist
> Of atoms, sparkling in the noonday beam.

A pretty little vignette, which the threshing-machine has now made antique. There were ramblings, picnics, and little dinner-parties. Lady Hesketh kept a carriage. Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, was visited as well as Weston Hall; the life of the lonely pair was fast becoming social. The Rev. John Newton was absent in the flesh, but he was present in the spirit, thanks to the tattle of Olney. To show that he was, he addressed to Mrs. Unwin a letter of remonstrance on the serious change which had taken place in the habits of his spiritual children. It was answered by her companion, who in repelling the censure mingles the dignity of self-respect with a just appreciation of the censor's motives, in a style which showed that although he was sometimes mad, he was not a fool.

Having succeeded in one great poem, Cowper thought of writing another, and several subjects were started—*The Mediterranean*, *The Four Ages of Man*, *Yardley Oak*. *The Mediterranean* would not have suited him well if it was to be treated historically, for of history he was even more ignorant than most of those who have had the benefit of a classical education, being capable of believing that the Latin element of our language had come in with the Roman conquest. Of the *Four Ages* he wrote a fragment. Of *Yardley Oak* he wrote the opening; it was apparently to have been a survey of the countries in connexion with an immemorial oak which stood in a neighbouring chace. But he was forced to say that the

mind of man was not a fountain but a cistern, and his was a broken one. He had expended his stock of materials for a long poem in *The Task*.

These, the sunniest days of Cowper's life, however, gave birth to many of those short poems which are perhaps his best, certainly his most popular works, and which will probably keep his name alive when *The Task* is read only in extracts. *The Loss of the Royal George*, *The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk*, *The Poplar Field*, *The Shrubbery*, the *Lines on a Young Lady*, and those *To Mary*, will hold their places for ever in the treasury of English Lyrics. In its humble way *The Needless Alarm* is one of the most perfect of human compositions. Cowper had reason to complain of Æsop for having written his fables before him. One great charm of these little pieces is their perfect spontaneity. Many of them were never published; and generally they have the air of being the simple effusions of the moment, gay or sad. When Cowper was in good spirits his joy, intensified by sensibility and past suffering, played like a fountain of light on all the little incidents of his quiet life. An ink-glass, a flatting mill, a halibut served up for dinner, the killing of a snake in the garden, the arrival of a friend wet after a journey, a cat shut up in a drawer, sufficed to elicit a little jet of poetical delight, the highest and brightest jet of all being *John Gilpin*. Lady Austen's voice and touch still faintly live in two or three pieces which were written for her harpsichord. Some of the short poems on the other hand are poured from the darker urn, and the finest of them all is the saddest. There is no need of illustrations unless it be to call attention to a secondary quality less noticed than those of more importance. That which used to be

specially called "wit," the faculty of ingenious and unexpected combination, such as is shown in the similes of *Hudibras*, was possessed by Cowper in large measure.

A friendship that in frequent fits
Of controversial rage emits
  The sparks of disputation,
Like hand-in-hand insurance plates,
Most unavoidably creates
  The thought of conflagration.

Some fickle creatures boast a soul
True as a needle to the pole,
  Their humour yet so various—
They manifest their whole life through
The needle's deviations too,
  Their love is so precarious.

The great and small but rarely meet
On terms of amity complete;
  Plebeians must surrender,
And yield so much to noble folk,
It is combining fire with smoke,
  Obscurity with splendour.

Some are so placid and serene
(As Irish bogs are always green)
  They sleep secure from waking;
And are indeed a bog, that bears
Your unparticipated cares
  Unmoved and without quaking.

Courtier and patriot cannot mix
Their heterogeneous politics
  Without an effervescence,
Like that of salts with lemon juice,
Which does not yet like that produce
  A friendly coalescence.

Faint presages of Byron are heard in such a poem as *The Shrubbery*, and of Wordsworth in such a poem as

that *To a Young Lady*. But of the lyrical depth and passion of the great Revolution poets Cowper is wholly devoid. His soul was stirred by no movement so mighty, if it were even capable of the impulse. Tenderness he has, and pathos as well as playfulness; he has unfailing grace and ease; he has clearness like that of a trout-stream. Fashions, even our fashions, change. The more metaphysical poetry of our time has indeed too much in it, besides the metaphysics, to be in any danger of being ever laid on the shelf with the once admired conceits of Cowley; yet it may one day in part lose, while the easier and more limpid kind of poetry may in part regain, its charm.

The opponents of the Slave Trade tried to enlist this winning voice in the service of their cause. Cowper disliked the task, but he wrote two or three anti-Slave-Trade ballads. *The Slave Trader in the Dumps*, with its ghastly array of horrors dancing a jig to a ballad metre, justifies the shrinking of an artist from a subject hardly fit for art.

If the cistern which had supplied *The Task* was exhausted, the rill of occasional poems still ran freely, fed by a spring which so long as life presented the most trivial object or incident could not fail. Why did not Cowper go on writing these charming pieces which he evidently produced with the greatest facility? Instead of this, he took, under an evil star, to translating Homer. The translation of Homer into verse is the Polar Expedition of literature, always failing, yet still desperately renewed. Homer defies modern reproduction. His primeval simplicity is a dew of the dawn which can never be re-distilled. His primeval savagery is almost equally unpresentable. What civilized poet can don the bar-

barian sufficiently to revel, or seem to revel, in the ghastly details of carnage, in hideous wounds described with surgical gusto, in the butchery of captives in cold blood, or even in those particulars of the shambles and the spit which to the troubadour of barbarism seem as delightful as the images of the harvest and the vintage? Poetry can be translated into poetry only by taking up the ideas of the original into the mind of the translator, which is very difficult when the translator and the original are separated by a gulf of thought and feeling, and when the gulf is very wide, becomes impossible. There is nothing for it in the case of Homer but a prose translation. Even in prose to find perfect equivalents for some of the Homeric phrases is not easy. Whatever the chronological date of the Homeric poems may be, their political and psychological date may be pretty well fixed. Politically they belong, as the episode of Thersites shows, to the rise of democracy and to its first collision with aristocracy, which Homer regards with the feelings of a bard who sang in aristocratic halls. Psychologically they belong to the time when in ideas and language, the moral was just disengaging itself from the physical. In the wail of Andromache for instance, *adinon epos*, which Pope improves into "sadly dear," and Cowper, with better taste at all events, renders "precious," is really semi-physical, and scarcely capable of exact translation. It belongs to an unreproducible past, like the fierce joy which, in the same wail, bursts from the savage woman in the midst of her desolation at the thought of the numbers whom her husband's hands had slain. Cowper had studied the Homeric poems thoroughly in his youth; he knew them so well that he was able to translate them, not very in-

correctly with only the help of a Clavis; he understood their peculiar qualities as well as it was possible for a reader without the historic sense to do; he had compared Pope's translation carefully with the original, and had decisively noted the defects which make it not a version of Homer, but a periwigged epic of the Augustan age. In his own translation he avoids Pope's faults, and he preserves at least the dignity of the original, while his command of language could never fail him, nor could he ever lack the guidance of good taste. But we well know where he will be at his best. We turn at once to such passages as the description of Calypso's Isle.

> Alighting on Pieria, down he (Hermes) stooped
> To Ocean, and the billows lightly skimmed
> In form a sea-mew, such as in the bays
> Tremendous of the barren deep her food
> Seeking, dips oft in brine her ample wing.
> In such disguise o'er many a wave he rode,
> But reaching, now, that isle remote, forsook
> The azure deep, and at the spacious grove
> Where dwelt the amber-tressed nymph arrived
> Found her within. A fire on all the hearth
> Blazed sprightly, and, afar diffused, the scent
> Of smooth-split cedar and of cypress-wood
> Odorous, burning cheered the happy isle.
> She, busied at the loom and plying fast
> Her golden shuttle, with melodious voice
> Sat chanting there; a grove on either side,
> Alder and poplar, and the redolent branch
> Wide-spread of cypress, skirted dark the cave
> Where many a bird of broadest pinion built
> Secure her nest, the owl, the kite, and daw,
> Long-tongued frequenters of the sandy shores.
> A garden vine luxuriant on all sides
> Mantled the spacious cavern, cluster-hung
> Profuse; four fountains of serenest lymph,

> Their sinuous course pursuing side by side,
> Strayed all around, and everywhere appeared
> Meadows of softest verdure purpled o'er
> With violets; it was a scene to fill
> A God from heaven with wonder and delight.

There are faults in this and even blunders, notably in the natural history; and "serenest lymph" is a sad departure from Homeric simplicity. Still on the whole the passage in the translation charms, and its charm is tolerably identical with that of the original. In more martial and stirring passages the failure is more signal, and here especially we feel that if Pope's rhyming couplets are sorry equivalents for the Homeric hexameter, blank verse is superior to them only in a negative way. The real equivalent, if any, is the romance metre of Scott, parts of whose poems, notably the last canto of *Marmion* and some passages in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, are about the most Homeric things in our language. Cowper brought such poetic gifts to his work that his failure might have deterred others from making the same hopeless attempt. But a failure his work is; the translation is no more a counterpart of the original, than the Ouse creeping through its meadows is the counterpart of the Ægean rolling before a fresh wind and under a bright sun. Pope delights school-boys; Cowper delights nobody, though on the rare occasions when he is taken from the shelf, he commends himself, in a certain measure, to the taste and judgment of cultivated men.

In his translations of Horace, both those from the Satires and those from the Odes, Cowper succeeds far better. Horace requires in his translator little of the fire which Cowper lacked. In the Odes he requires grace,

in the Satires urbanity and playfulness, all of which Cowper had in abundance. Moreover, Horace is separated from us by no intellectual gulf. He belongs to what Dr. Arnold called the modern period of ancient history. Nor is Cowper's translation of part of the eighth book of Virgil's Æneid bad, in spite of the heaviness of the blank verse. Virgil, like Horace, is within his intellectual range.

As though a translation of the whole of the Homeric poems had not been enough to bury his finer faculty, and prevent him from giving us any more of the minor poems, the publishers seduced him into undertaking an edition of Milton, which was to eclipse all its predecessors in splendour. Perhaps he may have been partly entrapped by a chivalrous desire to rescue his idol from the disparagement cast on it by the tasteless and illiberal Johnson. The project after weighing on his mind and spirits for some time was abandoned, leaving as its traces only translations of Milton's Latin poems, and a few notes on *Paradise Lost*, in which there is too much of religion, too little of art.

Lady Hesketh had her eye on the Laureateship, and probably with that view persuaded her cousin to write loyal verses on the recovery of George III. He wrote the verses, but to the hint of the Laureateship he said, "Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreaths beside may hereafter adorn them. It would be a leaden extinguisher clapt on my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading." Besides, was he not already the mortuary poet of All Saints, Northampton?

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTERS.

Southey, no mean judge in such a matter, calls Cowper the best of English letter-writers. If the first place is shared with him by any one it is by Byron, rather than by Gray, whose letters are pieces of fine writing, addressed to literary men, or Horace Walpole, whose letters are memoirs, the English counterpart of St. Simon. The letters both of Gray and Walpole are manifestly written for publication. Those of Cowper have the true epistolary charm. They are conversation, perfectly artless, and at the same time autobiography, perfectly genuine, whereas all formal autobiography is cooked. They are the vehicles of the writer's thoughts and feelings, and the mirror of his life. We have the strongest proofs that they were not written for publication. In many of them there are outpourings of wretchedness which could not possibly have been intended for any heart but that to which they were addressed, while others contain medical details which no one would have thought of presenting to the public eye. Some, we know, were answers to letters received but a moment before; and Southey says that the manuscripts are very free from erasures. Though Cowper kept a note-book for subjects, which no doubt were scarce with him, it is manifest that he did not premeditate. Grace of

form he never lacks, but this was a part of his nature, improved by his classical training. The character and the thoughts presented are those of a recluse who was sometimes a hypochondriac; the life is life at Olney. But simple self-revelation is always interesting, and a garrulous playfulness with great happiness of expression can lend a certain charm even to things most trivial and commonplace. There is also a certain pleasure in being carried back to the quiet days before railways and telegraphs, when people passed their whole lives on the same spot, and life moved always in the same tranquil round. In truth it is to such days that letter-writing, as a species of literature belongs; telegrams and postal cards have almost killed it now.

The large collection of Cowper's letters is probably seldom taken from the shelf; and the "Elegant Extracts" select those letters which are most sententious, and therefore least characteristic. Two or three specimens of the other style may not be unwelcome or needless as elements of a biographical sketch; though specimens hardly do justice to a series of which the charm, such as it is, is evenly diffused, not gathered into centres of brilliancy like Madame de Sévigné's letter on the Orleans Marriage. Here is a letter written in the highest spirits to Lady Hesketh.

"Olney, *Feb. 9th*, 1786.

"My dearest Cousin,—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it.

I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove the Ouse and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty.

"And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in

which lodges Puss at present; but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

"My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be anything better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.

"Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin.

"W. C."

Here, by way of contrast, is a letter written in the lowest spirits possible to Mr. Newton. It displays literary grace inalienable even in the depths of hypochondria. It also shows plainly the connexion of hypochondria with the weather. January was a month to the return of which the sufferer always looked forward with dread as a mysterious season of evil. It was a season, especially at

Olney, of thick fog combined with bitter frosts. To Cowper this state of the atmosphere appeared the emblem of his mental state; we see in it the cause. At the close the letter slides from spiritual despair to the worsted-merchant, showing that, as we remarked before, the language of despondency had become habitual, and does not always flow from a soul really in the depths of woe.

To the Rev. John Newton.

"*Jan.* 13*th*, 1784.

"My dear Friend,—I too have taken leave of the old year, and parted with it just when you did, but with very different sentiments and feelings upon the occasion. I looked back upon all the passages and occurrences of it, as a traveller looks back upon a wilderness through which he has passed with weariness, and sorrow of heart, reaping no other fruit of his labour, than the poor consolation that, dreary as the desert was, he has left it all behind him. The traveller would find even this comfort considerably lessened, if, as soon as he had passed one wilderness, another of equal length, and equally desolate, should expect him. In this particular, his experience and mine would exactly tally. I should rejoice, indeed, that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to prophesy a new one similar to it.

"The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no

friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit nearer the home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes everything, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it.

I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immovable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus?—why crippled and made useless in the Church, just at that time of life when, my judgment and experience being matured, I might be most useful?—why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost,—till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs to use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

"I am glad you have found so much hidden treasure; and Mrs. Unwin desires me to tell you that you did her no more than justice in believing that she would rejoice in it. It is not easy to surmise the reason why the reverend doctor, your predecessor, concealed it. Being a subject of a free government, and I suppose full of the divinity most in fashion, he could not fear lest his riches should expose him to persecution. Nor can I suppose that he held it any disgrace for a dignitary of the church to be wealthy, at a time when churchmen in general spare no pains to become so. But the wisdom of some men has a droll sort of knavishness in it, much like that of a magpie, who hides what he finds with a deal of contrivance, merely for the pleasure of doing it.

"Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. She wishes me to add that she shall be obliged to Mrs. Newton, if, when an

opportunity offers, she will give the worsted-merchant a jog. We congratulate you that Eliza does not grow worse, which I know you expected would be the case in the course of the winter. Present our love to her. Remember us to Sally Johnson, and assure yourself that we remain as warmly as ever,

"Yours,

"W. C.
"M. U."

In the next specimen we shall see the faculty of imparting interest to the most trivial incident by the way of telling it. The incident in this case is one which also forms the subject of the little poem called *The Colubriad.*

To the Rev. William Unwin.

"*Aug. 3rd,* 1782.

"My dear Friend,—Entertaining some hope that Mr. Newton's next letter would furnish me with the means of satisfying your inquiry on the subject of Dr. Johnson's opinion, I have till now delayed my answer to your last; but the information is not yet come, Mr. Newton having intermitted a week more than usual since his last writing. When I receive it, favourable or not, it shall be communicated to you; but I am not very sanguine in my expectations from that quarter. Very learned and very critical heads are hard to please. He may perhaps treat me with levity for the sake of my subject and design, but the composition, I think, will hardly escape his censure. Though all doctors may not be of the same mind, there is

one doctor at least, whom I have lately discovered, my professed admirer. He too, like Johnson, was with difficulty persuaded to read, having an aversion to all poetry, except the *Night Thoughts;* which, on a certain occasion, when being confined on board a ship he had no other employment, he got by heart. He was, however, prevailed upon, and read me several times over; so that if my volume had sailed with him, instead of Dr. Young's, I might perhaps have occupied that shelf in his memory which he then allotted to the Doctor: his name is Renny, and he lives at Newport Pagnel.

"It is a sort of paradox, but it is true: we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience. Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the afore-mentioned hiss at the nose of a kitten, almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few seconds missed him: he was gone, and I feared had escaped me. Still, however, the kitten sat watching immovably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round

immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot; with her claws, however, sheathed, and not in anger, but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed an act of decapitation, which though not immediately mortal proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the outhouses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him. Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.

"Our proposed removal to Mr. Small's was, as you suppose, a jest, or rather a joco-serious matter. We never looked upon it as entirely feasible, yet we saw in it something so like practicability, that we did not esteem it altogether unworthy of our attention. It was one of those projects which people of lively imaginations play with, and admire for a few days, and then break in pieces. Lady Austen returned on Thursday from London, where she spent the last fortnight, and whither she was called by an unexpected opportunity to dispose of the remainder of her lease. She has now, therefore, no longer any connexion with the great city, she has none on earth whom she calls friends but us, and no house but at Olney Her abode is to be at the vicarage, where she has hired as much

room as she wants, which she will embellish with her own furniture, and which she will occupy, as soon as the minister's wife has produced another child, which is expected to make its entry in October.

"Mr. Bull, a dissenting minister of Newport, a learned, ingenious, good-natured, pious friend of ours, who sometimes visits us, and whom we visited last week, has put into my hands three volumes of French poetry, composed by Madame Guyon;—a quietist, say you, and a fanatic, I will have nothing to do with her. It is very well, you are welcome to have nothing to do with her, but in the meantime her verse is the only French verse I ever read that I found agreeable; there is a neatness in it equal to that which we applaud with so much reason in the compositions of Prior. I have translated several of them, and shall proceed in my translations, till I have filled a Lilliputian paper-book I happen to have by me, which, when filled, I shall present to Mr. Bull. He is her passionate admirer, rode twenty miles to see her picture in the house of a stranger, which stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it, and it now hangs over his parlour chimney. It is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and were it encompassed with a glory, instead of being dressed in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel.

"Our meadows are covered with a winter-flood in August; the rushes with which our bottomless chairs were to have been bottomed, and much hay, which was not carried, are gone down the river on a voyage to Ely, and it is even uncertain whether they will ever return. Sic transit gloria mundi!

"I am glad you have found a curate; may he answer!

Am happy in Mrs. Bouverie's continued approbation; it is worth while to write for such a reader. Yours,

"W. C."

The power of imparting interest to commonplace incidents is so great that we read with a sort of excitement a minute account of the conversion of an old card-table into a writing and dining-table, with the causes and consequences of that momentous event; curiosity having been first cunningly aroused by the suggestion that the clerical friend to whom the letter is addressed might, if the mystery were not explained, be haunted by it when he was getting into his pulpit, at which time, as he had told Cowper, perplexing questions were apt to come into his mind.

A man who lived by himself could have little but himself to write about. Yet in these letters there is hardly a touch of offensive egotism. Nor is there any querulousness, except that of religious despondency. From those weaknesses Cowper was free. Of his proneness to self-revelation we have had a specimen already.

The minor antiquities of the generations immediately preceding ours are becoming rare, as compared with those of remote ages, because nobody thinks it worth while to preserve them. It is almost as easy to get a personal memento of Priam or Nimrod as it is to get a harpsichord, a spinning-wheel, a tinder-box, or a scratch-back. An Egyptian wig is attainable, a wig of the Georgian era is hardly so, much less a tie of the Regency. So it is with the scenes of common life a century or two ago. They are being lost, because they were familiar. Here are two of them, however, which have limned themselves

with the distinctness of the camera obscura on the page of a chronicler of trifles.

To the Rev. John Newton.

"*Nov.* 17*th*, 1783.

"My dear Friend,—The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not yet learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; S. R. for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he, good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron-work, the property of Griggs the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to

be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with yellow ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable H., who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-End, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazon fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle thrashed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much; and, to speak a little in his own style, more

inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

"Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough overhead. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be overhead, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt a night or two since that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and, with one flourish of my whip, descended; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it.

"I beg you will accept for yourself and yours our unfeigned love, and remember me affectionately to Mr. Bacon, when you see him.

"Yours, my dear friend,

"Wm. Cowper."

To the Rev. John Newton.

"*March 29th*, 1784.

"My dear Friend,—It being his Majesty's pleasure, that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the Parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

"As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water-mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys bellowed, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

"Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at the window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard,

the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he, and as many more as could find chairs, were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he suspended from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side

of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the country, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner, perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them.

"Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurt him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended; but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and tears away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

"Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton's affectionate and faithful,

"W. C.
"M. U."

In 1789 the French Revolution advancing with thunder-tread makes even the hermit of Weston look up for a

moment from his translation of Homer, though he little dreamed that he with his gentle philanthropy and sentimentalism had anything to do with the great overturn of the social and political systems of the past. From time to time some crash of especial magnitude awakens a faint echo in the letters.

To Lady Hesketh.

"*July 7th*, 1790.

"Instead of beginning with the saffron-vested mourning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron vest to boast, I shall begin with you. It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

"Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me; he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side, but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that He gives her largely.

"The French who, like all lively folks, are extreme in everything, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank

and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society; but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics: and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idol. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely. I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it."

This, it will be admitted, is very moderate and unapocalyptic. Presently Monarchical Europe takes arms against the Revolution. But there are two political observers at least who see that Monarchical Europe is making a mistake—Kaunitz and Cowper. "The French," observes Cowper to Lady Hesketh in December, 1792, "are a vain and childish people, and conduct themselves on this grand occasion with a levity and extravagance nearly akin to madness; but it would have been better for Austria and Prussia to let them alone. All nations have a right to choose their own form of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for whenever the people choose to be masters, they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have reform, we certainly shall. Depend upon

it, my dear, the hour has come when power founded on patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions, too, must be made to Dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them—a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and sooner or later, by fair means or by foul, they will have them." Even in 1793, though he expresses, as he well might, a cordial abhorrence of the doings of the French, he calls them not fiends, but "madcaps." He expresses the strongest indignation against the Tory mob which sacked Priestley's house at Birmingham, as he does, in justice be it said, against all manifestations of fanaticism. We cannot help sometimes wishing, as we read these passages in the letters, that their calmness and reasonableness could have been communicated to another "Old Whig," who was setting the world on fire with his anti-revolutionary rhetoric.

It is true, as has already been said, that Cowper was "extramundane;" and that his political reasonableness was in part the result of the fancy that he and his fellow-saints had nothing to do with the world but to keep themselves clear of it, and let it go its own way to destruction. But it must also be admitted that while the wealth of Establishments, of which Burke was the ardent defender, is necessarily reactionary in the highest degree, the tendency of religion itself, where it is genuine and sincere, must be to repress any selfish feeling about class or position, and to make men, in temporal matters, more willing to sacrifice the present to the future, especially where the hope is held out of moral as well as of material improvement. Thus it has come to pass that men who professed and imagined themselves to have no interest

in this world, have practically been its great reformers and improvers in the political and material as well as in the moral sphere.

The last specimen shall be one in the more sententious style, and one which proves that Cowper was capable of writing in a judicious manner on a difficult and delicate question—even a question so difficult and so delicate as that of the propriety of painting the face.

To the Rev. William Unwin.

"*May 3rd*, 1784.

"My dear Friend,—The subject of face painting may be considered, I think, in two points of view. First, there is room for dispute with respect to the consistency of the practice with good morals; and secondly, whether it be on the whole convenient or not, may be a matter worthy of agitation. I set out with all the formality of logical disquisition, but do not promise to observe the same regularity any further than it may comport with my purpose of writing as fast as I can.

"As to the immorality of the custom, were I in France, I should see none. On the contrary, it seems in that country to be a symptom of modest consciousness, and a tacit confession of what all know to be true, that French faces have in fact neither red nor white of their own. This humble acknowledgment of a defect looks the more like a virtue, being found among a people not remarkable for humility. Again, before we can prove the practice to be immoral, we must prove immorality in the design of those who use it; either that they intend a deception, or to kindle unlawful desires in the beholders. But the

French ladies, so far as their purpose comes in question, must be acquitted of both these charges. Nobody supposes their colour to be natural for a moment, any more than he would if it were blue or green: and this unambiguous judgment of the matter is owing to two causes: first, to the universal knowledge we have, that French women are naturally either brown or yellow, with very few exceptions; and secondly, to the inartificial manner in which they paint; for they do not, as I am most satisfactorily informed, even attempt an imitation of nature, but besmear themselves hastily, and at a venture, anxious only to lay on enough. Where therefore there is no wanton intention, nor a wish to deceive, I can discover no immorality. But in England, I am afraid, our painted ladies are not clearly entitled to the same apology. They even imitate nature with such exactness that the whole public is sometimes divided into parties, who litigate with great warmth the question whether painted or not? This was remarkably the case with a Miss B——, whom I well remember. Her roses and lilies were never discovered to be spurious, till she attained an age that made the supposition of their being natural impossible. This anxiety to be not merely red and white, which is all they aim at in France, but to be thought very beautiful, and much more beautiful than Nature has made them, is a symptom not very favourable to the idea we would wish to entertain of the chastity, purity, and modesty of our countrywomen. That they are guilty of a design to deceive is certain. Otherwise why so much art? and if to deceive, wherefore and with what purpose? Certainly either to gratify vanity of the silliest kind, or, which is still more criminal, to decoy and

inveigle, and carry on more successfully the business of temptation. Here, therefore, my opinion splits itself into two opposite sides upon the same question. I can suppose a French woman, though painted an inch deep, to be a virtuous, discreet, excellent character; and in no instance should I think the worse of one because she was painted. But an English belle must pardon me if I have not the same charity for her. She is at least an impostor, whether she cheats me or not, because she means to do so; and it is well if that be all the censure she deserves.

"This brings me to my second class of ideas upon this topic; and here I feel that I should be fearfully puzzled, were I called upon to recommend the practice on the score of convenience. If a husband chose that his wife should paint, perhaps it might be her duty, as well as her interest, to comply. But I think he would not much consult his own, for reasons that will follow. In the first place, she would admire herself the more; and in the next, if she managed the matter well, she might be more admired by others; an acquisition that might bring her virtue under trials, to which otherwise it might never have been exposed. In no other case, however, can I imagine the practice in this country to be either expedient or convenient. As a general one it certainly is not expedient, because in general English women have no occasion for it. A swarthy complexion is a rarity here; and the sex, especially since inoculation has been so much in use, have very little cause to complain that nature has not been kind to them in the article of complexion. They may hide and spoil a good one; but they cannot, at least they hardly can, give themselves a better.

But even if they could, there is yet a tragedy in the sequel, which should make them tremble.

"I understand that in France, though the use of rouge be general, the use of white paint is far from being so. In England, she that uses one, commonly uses both. Now all white paints, or lotions or whatever they may be called, are mercurial, consequently poisonous, consequently ruinous in time to the constitution. The Miss B—— above mentioned was a miserable witness of this truth, it being certain that her flesh fell from her bones before she died. Lady Coventry was hardly a less melancholy proof of it; and a London physician perhaps, were he at liberty to blab, could publish a bill of female mortality, of a length that would astonish us.

"For these reasons I utterly condemn the practice, as it obtains in England; and for a reason superior to all these I must disapprove it. I cannot, indeed, discover that Scripture forbids it in so many words. But that anxious solicitude about the person, which such an artifice evidently betrays, is, I am sure, contrary to the tenor and spirit of it throughout. Show me a woman with a painted face, and I will show you a woman whose heart is set on things of the earth, and not on things above.

"But this observation of mine applies to it only when it is an imitative art. For in the use of French women, I think it is as innocent as in the use of a wild Indian, who draws a circle round her face, and makes two spots, perhaps blue, perhaps white, in the middle of it. Such are my thoughts upon the matter.

"*Vive valeque*,

"Yours ever,

"W. C"

These letters have been chosen as illustrations of Cowper's epistolary style, and for that purpose they have been given entire. But they are also the best pictures of his character; and his character is everything. The events of his life worthy of record might all be comprised in a dozen pages.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSE OF LIFE.

Cowper says there could not have been a happier trio on earth than Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Unwin, and himself. Nevertheless, after his removal to Weston, he again went mad, and once more attempted self-destruction. His malady was constitutional, and it settled down upon him as his years increased, and his strength failed. He was now sixty. The Olney physicians, instead of husbanding his vital power, had wasted it away *secundum artem* by purging, bleeding, and emetics. He had overworked himself on his fatal translation of Homer, under the burden of which he moved, as he says himself, like an ass overladen with sand-bags. He had been getting up to work at six, and not breakfasting till eleven. And now the life from which his had for so many years been fed, itself began to fail. Mrs. Unwin was stricken with paralysis; the stroke was slight, but of its nature there was no doubt. Her days of bodily life were numbered; of mental life there remained to her a still shorter span. Her excellent son, William Unwin, had died of a fever soon after the removal of the pair to Weston. He had been engaged in the work of his profession as a clergyman, and we do not hear of his being often at Olney. But he was in constant correspondence with Cowper, in

whose heart as well as in that of Mrs. Unwin his death must have left a great void, and his support was withdrawn just at the moment when it was about to become most necessary.

Happily just at this juncture a new and a good friend appeared. Hayley was a mediocre poet, who had for a time obtained distinction above his merits. Afterwards his star had declined, but having an excellent heart, he had not been in the least soured by the downfall of his reputation. He was addicted to a pompous rotundity of style; perhaps he was rather absurd; but he was thoroughly good-natured, very anxious to make himself useful, and devoted to Cowper, to whom, as a poet, he looked up with an admiration unalloyed by any other feeling. Both of them, as it happened, were engaged on Milton, and an attempt had been made to set them by the ears; but Hayley took advantage of it to introduce himself to Cowper with an effusion of the warmest esteem. He was at Weston when Mrs. Unwin was attacked with paralysis, and displayed his resource by trying to cure her with an electric-machine. At Eartham, on the coast of Sussex, he had, by an expenditure beyond his means, made for himself a little paradise, where it was his delight to gather a distinguished circle. To this place he gave the pair a pressing invitation, which was accepted in the vain hope that a change might do Mrs. Unwin good.

From Weston to Eartham was a three days' journey, an enterprise not undertaken without much trepidation and earnest prayer. It was safely accomplished, however, the enthusiastic Mr. Rose walking to meet his poet and philosopher on the way. Hayley had tried to get Thur-

low to meet Cowper. A sojourn in a country house with the tremendous Thurlow, the only talker for whom Johnson condescended to prepare himself, would have been rather an overpowering pleasure; and perhaps, after all, it was as well that Hayley could only get Cowper's disciple, Hurdis, afterwards professor of poetry at Oxford, and Charlotte Smith.

At Eartham, Cowper's portrait was painted by Romney.

> Romney, expert infallibly to trace
> On chart or canvas not the form alone
> And semblance, but, however faintly shown
> The mind's impression too on every face,
> With strokes that time ought never to erase,
> Thou hast so pencilled mine that though I own
> The subject worthless, I have never known
> The artist shining with superior grace;
> But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe
> In thy incomparable work appear:
> Well: I am satisfied it should be so
> Since on maturer thought the cause is clear;
> For in my looks what sorrow could'st thou see
> When I was Hayley's guest and sat to thee.

Southey observes that it was likely enough there would be no melancholy in the portrait, but that Hayley and Romney fell into a singular error in mistaking for "the light of genius" what Leigh Hunt calls "a fire fiercer than that either of intellect or fancy, gleaming from the raised and protruded eye."

Hayley evidently did his utmost to make his guest happy. They spent the hours in literary chat, and compared notes about Milton. The first days were days of enjoyment. But soon the recluse began to long for his nook at Weston. Even the extensiveness of the

view at Eartham made his mind ache, and increased his melancholy. To Weston the pair returned; the paralytic, of course, none the better for her journey. Her mind as well as her body was now rapidly giving way. We quote as biography that which is too well known to be quoted as poetry.

TO MARY.

The twentieth year is well nigh past
Since first our sky was overcast:—
Ah, would that this might be the last!
My Mary!

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
I see thee daily weaker grow:—
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary!

Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary!

For though thou gladly wouldst fulfil
The same kind office for me still,
Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary!

But well thou play'dst the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art,
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary!

Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language utter'd in a dream:
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary!

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary!

For could I view nor them nor thee,
What sight worth seeing could I see?
The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary!

Partakers of thy sad decline,
Thy hands their little force resign;
Yet gently press'd, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Such feebleness of limbs thou provest,
That now at every step thou movest,
Upheld by two; yet still thou lovest,
My Mary!

And still to love, though press'd with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

But ah! by constant heed I know,
How oft the sadness that I show
Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,
My Mary!

And should my future lot be cast
With much resemblance of the past,
Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
My Mary!

Even love, at least the power of manifesting love, began to betray its mortality. She who had been so devoted, became, as her mind failed, exacting, and instead of supporting her partner, drew him down. He sank again into the depth of hypochondria. As usual, his malady took the form of religious horrors, and he fancied that he was ordained to undergo severe penance for his sins. Six days he sat motionless and silent, almost refusing to take food. His physician suggested, as the only chance of arousing him, that Mrs. Unwin should be induced, if

possible, to invite him to go out with her; with difficulty she was made to understand what they wanted her to do; at last she said that it was a fine morning, and she should like a walk. Her partner at once rose and placed her arm in his. Almost unconsciously, she had rescued him from the evil spirit for the last time. The pair were in doleful plight. When their minds failed they had fallen in a miserable manner under the influence of a man named Teedon, a schoolmaster crazed with self-conceit, at whom Cowper in his saner mood had laughed, but whom he now treated as a spiritual oracle, and a sort of medium of communication with the spirit-world, writing down the nonsense which the charlatan talked. Mrs. Unwin, being no longer in a condition to control the expenditure, the housekeeping, of course, went wrong; and at the same time her partner lost the protection of the love-inspired tact by which she had always contrived to shield his weakness and to secure for him, in spite of his eccentricities, respectful treatment from his neighbours. Lady Hesketh's health had failed, and she had been obliged to go to Bath. Hayley now proved himself no mere lion-hunter, but a true friend. In conjunction with Cowper's relatives, he managed the removal of the pair from Weston to Mundsley, on the coast of Norfolk, where Cowper seemed to be soothed by the sound of the sea, then to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham, and finally (in 1796) to East Dereham, where, two months after their arrival, Mrs. Unwin died. Her partner was barely conscious of his loss. On the morning of her death he asked the servant "whether there was life above stairs?" On being taken to see the corpse, he gazed at it for a moment, uttered one passionate cry of grief, and

never spoke of Mrs. Unwin more. He had the misfortune to survive her three years and a half, during which relatives and friends were kind, and Miss Perowne partly filled the place of Mrs. Unwin. Now and then, there was a gleam of reason and faint revival of literary faculty; but composition was confined to Latin verse or translation, with one memorable and almost awful exception. The last original poem written by Cowper was *The Castaway*, founded on an incident in Anson's Voyage.

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Wash'd headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.

No braver chief could Albion boast
Than he with whom he went,
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast
With warmer wishes sent.
He loved them both, but both in vain;
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine
Expert to swim, he lay;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
Or courage die away;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted; nor his friends had fail'd
To check the vessel's course,
But so the furious blast prevail'd,
That pitiless perforce
They left their outcast mate behind,
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succour yet they could afford;
And, such as storms allow,
The cask, the coop, the floated cord,
Delay'd not to bestow:
But he, they knew, nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

Nor, cruel as it seem'd, could he
Their haste himself condemn,
Aware that flight, in such a sea,
Alone could rescue them;
Yet bitter felt it still to die
Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld;
And so long he, with unspent power,
His destiny repelled:
And ever, as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried—"Adieu!"

At length, his transient respite past,
His comrades, who before
Had heard his voice in every blast,
Could catch the sound no more:
For then by toil subdued, he drank
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him; but the page
Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
Is wet with Anson's tear:
And tears by bards or heroes shed
Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream,
Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
A more enduring date:
But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

The despair which finds vent in verse is hardly despair. Poetry can never be the direct expression of emotion; it must be the product of reflection combined with an exercise of the faculty of composition which in itself is pleasant. Still *The Castaway* ought to be an antidote to religious depression, since it is the work of a man of whom it would be absurdity to think as really estranged from the spirit of good, who had himself done good to the utmost of his powers.

Cowper died very peacefully on the morning of April 25, 1800, and was buried in Dereham Church, where there is a monument to him with an inscription by Hayley, which, if it is not good poetry, is a tribute of sincere affection.

Any one whose lot it is to write upon the life and works of Cowper must feel that there is an immense difference between the interest which attaches to him, and that which attaches to any one among the far greater poets of the succeeding age. Still there is something about him so attractive, his voice has such a silver tone, he retains, even in his ashes, such a faculty of winning friends that his biographer and critic may be easily beguiled into giving him too high a place. He belongs to a particular religious movement, with the vitality of which the interest of a great part of his works has departed or is departing. Still more emphatically and in

a still more important sense does he belong to Christianity. In no natural struggle for existence would he have been the survivor, by no natural process of selection would he ever have been picked out as a vessel of honour. If the shield which for eighteen centuries Christ by His teaching and His death has spread over the weak things of this world should fail, and might should again become the title to existence and the measure of worth, Cowper will be cast aside as a specimen of despicable infirmity, and all who have said anything in his praise will be treated with the same scorn.

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